

INTRODUCTION

Flathead County is a general law county and, as such, is a political subdivision of the State of Montana, having corporate powers and exercising the sovereignty of the State of Montana within its boundaries, as provided in the Montana Constitution, those powers specified by statute and those necessarily implied there from.

Only the Flathead County Board of County Commissioners (hereinafter referred to as the "Board") can exercise the powers of the County by agents and officers acting under the authority of the Board. The Board serves as the Chief Executive authority of the County government and is charged by law with performing all duties necessary to the full discharge of these specified and implied executive duties. The Board is charged with governing Flathead County in the best interest of all its citizens. One of its duties is to supervise and protect the tax base of the County.

The Board is aware that one goal of the County's citizens, and therefore its government, has been the continuation of a lifestyle which assures quiet enjoyment of private property rights and property interests and assures the highest degree of protection of these rights. Property rights and interests are important to the people who live and work in Flathead County which has an area larger than some states, but the population of a small city. Many people who live in the County are reliant on the land and its productive use. Private ownership and incentive provided by private ownership is a driving force that supports the livelihood of many Flathead County citizens.

Federal and state-managed lands make up 77.3 % of the area of Flathead County. Moreover, the County's economy is deeply affected by changes on federal, state, and private lands. State and federal agencies are charged by law governing state and federal lands inside Flathead County's political boundary, to be managed in the best interest of all citizens. Local, tribal, state and federal planning decisions may create benefits for a great many state, nation, and tribal citizens outside the County, but may transfer a disproportionate amount of the costs and responsibilities to local communities and citizens. For more information on the County's relationship to the federal government, please refer to Appendices A, C, and E.

The Board believes that the American concept of "government of the people, by the people and for the people" is best served when government affairs are conducted as close to the people as possible (i.e. at the county level). The Board is charged to carry out its specified and inherent duties to operate the government of Flathead County in the best interests of all its citizens and to protect and preserve the County's tax base. The Board finds it desirable to address the use and management of other resources within the political jurisdiction of the County in its comprehensive planning efforts.

The Board reached its decision in part because the use and management of that land has substantial and significant impact on the economic stability of the County. The Board is, therefore, legitimately interested in full participation in the planning process utilized by federal, state, and tribal agencies for determining and implementing land use plans and other actions in Flathead County. The Board's interest extends to land use plans or action formulation, development, and implementation (which include monitoring and evaluation).

The Board has established a Planning Board and community-based subcommittee to advise and assist the Board in formulating County policy with respect to land and resource use issues. For purposes of this document, the subcommittee is known as the *Flathead Natural Resource Committee* (FNRC) and the plan they are working on is known as the *Flathead Natural Resource Use Policy*. For more information on the Resource Committee and its operation, please refer to Appendices D, H, and K.

It is the intent of Flathead County government to protect the custom and culture of County citizens through a variety of actions. It is the policy of Flathead County to work with federal, state, and tribal agencies to coordinate and consider County, State and Federal policies before implementing actions, both within and without the boundaries of Flathead County that affect local communities and citizens.

Federal and state laws require federal and state agencies to coordinate with local government and consider the local land use plans in the process of planning and managing federal and state lands within the geographic boundaries of Flathead County, Montana. Federal and state agencies proposing actions that will impact the County, its citizens, and resources therein should prepare and submit in writing, in a timely manner, report(s) on the purposes, objectives and estimated impacts of such actions, including economic, to the Flathead County Board of County

Commissioners, 800 South Main Street, Kalispell, MT 59901 for review. The Board will then determine appropriate action to be taken by the County and provide input, information and comment on proposed actions or activities. The Board will also notify other government agencies of actions that are proposed by the Board affecting various resources and amenities in Flathead County and solicit other agency input and comment. The purpose of this exchange of information and input is to minimize impact upon and maximize benefit to the residents of the County as well as other members of the public. For more information on coordination between the County and agencies, please refer to Appendices H & J.

FLATHEAD COUNTY

Flathead County is located in the northwest area of Montana. It is the largest land mass county in the fourth largest state in the continental United States. The county encompasses 3,361,800 acres or 5,252.81 square miles. Approximately 94% of the land mass is National or State Forest Land, wilderness, agricultural, and corporate timber lands.

The 2000 census shows the county population at 74,471 people. The 1990 census was 59,218. Year 2004 population is estimated at 79,485. As of the year 2000 it was populated with 14.6 people per square mile in contrast to 7.7 people per square mile in 1970. Since the 1990's population growth has been fueled by people moving into the county.

The County is bounded on the north by the Canadian border, on the west by Lincoln County and the Kootenai National Forest, on the southwest by Sanders County and the Lolo National Forest, and on the south by Lake, Powell, and Missoula Counties, and the Flathead Indian Reservation. The County's east boundary is the continental divide of the Chinese Wall of the Rocky Mountains and extends from within the Bob Marshall Wilderness through Glacier Park to the Canadian border.

Flathead County is primarily forested land with the main Flathead Valley as agricultural (farming and ranching) interspersed with cities, towns, and urban areas of habitation.

Portions of the Flathead National Forest lie within Lincoln, Lake, Missoula, and Powell Counties. Total acres of the Flathead National Forest is 2,353,049 acres. Of those 217,532 acres is non-forest land. There are 881,212 acres of wilderness of which 18,356 is non-forested and 580,502 acres of roadless area. The suitable timber base is 673,803 acres or 28.6% of the total Flathead National Forest. Eighty seven percent (87%) of the Forest is occupied grizzly bear habitat. Sixty percent (60%) of the suitable timber base or 404,282 acres is grizzly bear habitat.

The County's economy and social aspects were predominately and historically based on agriculture, forestry, and mining. Some mining claims are still evident such as the Hog Heaven and Star Meadows mine. Early years saw an attempt to mine coal in the North Fork of the Flathead River and transport it by water to the main valley. There was an attempt to drill for oil in the North Fork in the area of coal deposits. Logging, mining and trapping began with the early Flathead settlers in the late 1800's. Recreational use was enhanced by the establishment of Glacier National Park in 1910 and the establishment of the Bob Marshall Wilderness in 1940.

Beginning in the 1960's and 1980's the County has experienced a steady increase in population growth and growth of manufacturing and fabrication facilities of various kinds and sizes. Following construction of Hungry Horse Dam and Reservoir in the late 1940's and 1950's, the Anaconda Company constructed an aluminum plant in Columbia Falls and was one of the larger employers in the County. The Dam also saw construction of large power transmission lines through the County.

Due to the vast amounts of forests within Flathead County and the contiguous Flathead National Forest, forestry management, timber harvest, fishing and hunting have always been a major factor in the social and economic history, custom and culture history of Flathead County. Numerous sawmills and wood products processing plants were built from the time of early settlers and modernized through time. Many sawmills have gone from existence in recent years. Larger and medium size mills remain.

Since the early 1990's the Flathead National Forest's output of raw timber has dropped from 120 million board feet annually to as low as 4 million board feet. Consequently many sawmill and logging operations have gone out of business. The annual growth on the Flathead National Forest is 60 mm (million) board feet on the suitable timber base, and the annual mortality is 53 mmbf. The allowable sale quantity set at 52 mm. bd.ft.

The County economy continues with fluctuations and a conversion away from the use of natural resources to other manufacturing and expanding service sector. Availability of federal timber has been terminated. Private timberland owners have met local demand and have been harvesting and properly managing their holdings.

Flathead County's greatest challenge in the coming decades will be dealing with the economy. Over the past several decades the county's basic economic sectors have been changing rapidly. The goods and service sector expands with a growing population trend. There is less use of local natural resources and a change to importing and manufacturing.

As well as a vast service sector, the County has sizable government and educational employment such as Flathead Valley Community College, four sizable public schools, several private schools, U.S. Forest Service and a wide variety of federal, state, and county offices. The Kalispell Regional Health Center has rapidly expanded beginning in the early 1990's and continuing to expand. The complex is one of the leading employers in the valley.

For much of the history, custom and culture of Flathead County, see "Trails of the Past: Historic Overview of the Flathead National Forest, 1860 - 1960 by Kathryn L. McKay. The document is available at the Flathead National Forest, 1935 Third Ave. East, Kalispell, MT 59901. There are also numerous books of the Flathead Valley's history, custom and culture by local authors available in local bookstores.

FLATHEAD COUNTY LAND OWNERSHIP

Flathead County Total Acres = 3,361,800*

<u>Ownership</u>	<u>Acres</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Federal Government	2,453,540	73.0
State of Montana	143,221	4.3
Tribal	28,641	0.9
Industrial Private	296,355	8.8
Non-industrial Private	<u>440,043</u>	<u>13.0</u>
Total	3,361,800	100.0

*Flathead County GIS Dept. and MT State Library Natural Resource Information System (NRIS)

CUSTOM AND CULTURE

The history of Flathead County is steeped in stories of the ruggedness of early settlers and the use of natural resources in the County to sustain their lives and livelihoods. There are reports of gold miners and prospectors, hunters, trappers and trading posts, loggers, sawmills, home and business construction, railroad tie production, coal mining and oil well drilling, livestock and crops. Establishment of the State and U.S. Forest Service brought roads, trails, telephone lines, ranger stations, work camps, and fire lookouts. The railroad came and with it highways, Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) camps and work projects.

Establishment of Glacier National Park and the building of “The Going To The Sun Highway and the Bob Marshall Wilderness added to the recreation opportunities both locally and internationally. Hungry Horse Dam and Reservoir and an aluminum processing plant brought employment to the County. Recreation, including a major ski resort, has become a significant industry. During the early years towns sprang up, some disappeared, and others grew to their current existence.

The coming of the railroad was a significant event that changed history, custom and culture in Flathead County and the West. The last railroad spike was driven on January 6, 1893, on the Great Northern Railroad through Marias Pass completed the transcontinental line between Minnesota and Pacific Ocean. (See “railroads” in “Trails of the Past: Historic Overview of the Flathead National Forest, Montana, 1800-1960, by Kathryn L. McKay)

The custom and culture of Flathead County has always been driven by available technology and the presence of valuable natural resources, timber being dominant. Other factors have included the distance to markets, prices, and forces of marketplace.

Access rights-of-way and water rights were historically critical to the early settlers as they are today. The federal government owns 73% of the 3.36 million acres of land in Flathead County. The State of Montana owns 4.3%, leaving on 21.8% in private ownership. A map of the County shows a checkerboard of federal, state, and private land. Rights-of-way across the state and federal lands are necessary to provide private landowners access to their property.

Beneficial use of natural resources has been the basis for Flathead County’s economy, custom and culture. Modern technology, mechanization, and markets have altered the means of production and marketing of these resources from their historic beginnings.

Timber harvest and milling, mining, farming, ranching and recreation provided the heritage of the county’s residents, and such activities continue today. This is a land in which nature plays the upper hand. Early settlers of this land worked hard to establish their livelihood, and to maintain that livelihood, today’s residents must work equally hard.

In recent times the use of natural resources of the Flathead National Forest within the County has become less available. Road access for recreation, timber harvest and other resource use has been reduced. There is a cessation of timber management, timber resources and other management of benefit to all forms of life on the national forest lands within and contiguous to Flathead County. This has resulted in fire fuel loadings in the forests in addition to insect and disease epidemics. These conditions have been compounded by years of drought resulting in catastrophic wildfires and other negative affects to critical major watersheds. This has greatly affected and altered the county’s economic, social, custom and culture. There is hope Flathead National Forest can be returned to its original direction and mission established by law for managing public lands and forests for the public good. Social and economic aspects of industrial enterprise and the custom and culture of Flathead County have been greatly impacted. (See Appendix E for trends in the public lands timber harvest decline.)

ECONOMICS

A primary purpose of this Plan is to foster cooperation and coordination between federal and state management agencies, other counties and Flathead County. These interests include but are not limited to farming, ranching, timber, mining, recreation, wildlife and all other activities related to, and reliant upon, the availability of natural resources on federal and state managed, and private lands within their respective jurisdictions.

As noted in other sections of this document, the economy of Flathead County historically has been closely tied to the availability and management of natural resources. The economic challenge for Flathead County in the first decade of the 21st Century is finding the right balance between using and conserving natural resources in a way that supports all of the industries that have, according to Colorado College's *2004 State of the Rockies Report Card*, now created the most diverse economy in the Rocky Mountain West.

The availability and use of these resources impacts the ability of natural resource industries to pay wages and property taxes that support households and services throughout the county. At the same time, conservation of these resources, open space, and working landscapes also impacts the economy by attracting tourism, wealthy migrants, and entrepreneurs who value access to wilderness and the quality of life associated with a clean environment and abundant wildlife.

According to the U.S. Department of Commerce's Bureau of Economic Analysis, the lumber and wood products manufacturing industry in Flathead County as a whole has steadily lost jobs over the past two decades. Labor earnings have dropped from a high of \$97 million in 1993 to \$75 million in 2000. The story is the same in mining, agriculture and railroads. Taken together, these industries' share of all labor earnings has fallen from 11.4% in the mid-'70s to today's 6.8%. (See Appendix A for a list of employment in Flathead County by industry sector.)

At the same time that these industries reduce their contribution to the local economy through wages, they decrease their property tax payments to support county services as they lose their ability to make profits from the land. When unprofitable private land is acquired by federal and state agencies for conservation purposes, it is permanently removed from the tax base, adversely affecting funding for schools, health care, police, fire, and other needed services.

The federal government has several mechanisms to reimburse local government for loss of taxes. Payments to support local communities are derived from federal lands through the following mechanisms.

- * 25% of Forest Reserve Fund (or elected current alternative)

- * Payments in Lieu of Taxes (PILT)

- * Taylor Grazing Act Section 3 and Section 15

- * Refuge Revenue Sharing Act

For more detailed information on federal payments to local communities please refer to Appendix E.

Despite these job and property tax losses in the natural resource industries, the overall economy of Flathead County is strong and continues to grow. Per capita and median incomes are steadily rising, poverty is falling and unemployment is at a thirty-year low. This is due in part to an enormous and steady wave of new migrants who are attracted to the area because of the conservation and access to abundant natural resources. Many of these migrants are successful entrepreneurs who have contributed to making

the Kalispell area the 10th most dynamic small business non-metropolitan market in the nation (*American City Business Journal*, 2004).

Preliminary numbers from the Montana Department of Labor and Industry indicate that, despite significant layoffs at some prominent large employers, more than 1,100 jobs were added in Flathead County between 2002 and 2005. At the same time, property taxes on rapidly rising real estate have offset losses in property taxes paid by declining natural resource industries. Median home prices in Flathead County doubled between 1990 and 2000, rising from \$63,500 to \$120,000.

Although several studies portray the Flathead county economy in glowing terms as the surge of in-migration has brought in people with money who demand housing and a lot of services, many studies fail to address the negative aspects of this growth. Paramount of these oversights is the relationship and effects of how the huge growth in the service sector along with the decline of natural resource industries has caused Montana's average annual wage to decline to the lowest in the US in 1999-2002. The cost of living index in Kalispell, is always within 1-3% of the National average, so low wages are a significant problem especially to the 81% of Montana workers whose job does not require at least a bachelor's degree. Most of these economic reports also fail to address the reasons for natural resource industries decline. Their decline is not due to economic trends, but primarily due to external forces such as appeals and litigation of timber sales on Federal Lands in Flathead County. Mills have closed due to lack of log supply even during high markets. In 2005 wholesale lumber prices are approaching record. Existing forest industry in Flathead County is at extreme risk unless the supply from National Forests can be increased. (See Flathead County Supplemental Information, Appendix A Economic Information.)

The most significant change in the Flathead and national economy is the decreased portion of income derived from labor. Americans used to move to places to follow jobs. Now people with money and the ability to create jobs follow places they find desirable to live. Almost 40% of all personal income in the county now comes from non-labor income (transfer payments from investments, retirement accounts, and benefits) and this figure is expected to exceed 50% in the next decade. This phenomenon is partly a result of an aging society with fewer workers, but it also reflects the region's ability to attract new entrepreneurs, the self-employed, and wealthy retirees.

As Flathead County works with other jurisdictions to make decisions about the use of natural resources, the impact of all the above trends must be taken into account to ensure that the livelihood and quality of life for its 80,000+ residents is enhanced by a strong and stable economy. Changes in the availability and management of natural resources that go too far in favor of extraction or conservation could adversely affect the delicate balance of jobs, property taxes, quality of life, and migration patterns that have sustained the growing levels of prosperity enjoyed by County residents.

Flathead County, in an effort to guide the economic growth of the area for future generations, adopted the Flathead County Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) in 2002. The CEDS is intended to be the "guiding foundation for action by the total community" because an "accepted, agreed upon path is necessary for planning the future" during this period of transition.

The CEDS was written by a broad-based cross-section of business and community leaders, including representatives from many of the industries and communities most affected by changes in the availability and management of natural resources in the county. The following are the key findings and common goals of the CEDS.

- Maintaining the quality of life in Flathead County while providing livable wage employment.
- Need for a review of the Montana capital gains and personal income taxation structure to make modifications that would be friendlier to executives and to business owners.
- Tax modifications to increase funding for teacher's salaries were also a key part of the changes suggested by the Education Committee in order to put Montana on equal footing with surrounding states.
- Both the Business Development and Business Assistance committees included goals to develop a Valley Enterprise Center that could include all business development agencies and provide a comprehensive one-stop business development location with state of the art technology in all service areas.
- Affordable housing is necessary for continued economic development.
- Relations between cities and the county need to be improved.
- Infrastructure must be in place in order to attract new development.
- State of the art communications technology is a must for all groups.

An Agriculture & Natural Resources Committee was established to develop the following recommendations specific to these industries.

Goals and Objectives

1. Improve the economic viability of the natural resource based industries.

Strategies:

- a. Expand the membership types of the chambers of commerce that will encourage local natural resource individuals to join.
- b. Include members from natural resource-based industry.
- c. Raise awareness of the positive impact that natural resources make on the Flathead valley and its economy.
- d. Schedule “field days” to tour resources.
- e. Provide economic value statements to interested groups.
- f. Establish and fund a non-profit committee made up of natural resource professionals that will:
 1. Work to improve the economic viability of the natural resource producer.
 2. Promote the aesthetic value of the industry.
 3. Encourage and provide, during the Flathead County Fair, programs and displays that will promote the natural resource based industry within the valley.
 4. Raise the awareness of the general public of the positive role of natural resources within Flathead County.
 5. Provide workshops to Leadership Flathead, Youth Leadership, and other educational programs that will discuss the natural resources and their use within the valley.
6. Encourage programs that will promote the value of the natural resources to our community.

2. Provide incentive policies to existing and new natural resource related industries.

Strategies:

- a. Establish a process that will make a closer tie between the business community and the natural resource industries.
- b. Strategic partnering to existing and potential natural resource partners.

3. Promote and expand tax incentives and balanced tax policies to assist existing and new natural resources related industries.

Strategies:

- Support a balanced tax policy that is fair and equitable to all bio-based industries.
- Use public business tax incentives that will encourage new natural resource industries and maintain old ones.

4. Promote local and state control over natural resource policies.

Strategies:

- Streamline the local and state regulation process as it relates to the natural resource use and management without sacrificing good stewardship.
- Work with national policy makers to enhance their understanding of the use of natural resources in Flathead County.
- Promote and provide incentives in the marketing and processing potential for natural resource products and value added products.
- Actively pursue and assist businesses that will add to the value of our natural resources via grants and policies.
- Actively support the natural resource industries as to their economic viability.
- Support and promote the establishment of new natural resource based industries within the county.
- Establish a closer relationship between these businesses and county resources such as Flathead Valley Community College, State Forest Service and the Montana Agricultural Experiment Station.

As noted above, these strategies cannot be pursued alone and without consideration for the other industries and goals adopted throughout the CEDS (see Appendix O for the complete CEDS). It is the intention of this Plan to work with other jurisdictions on natural resource decisions in a way that promotes the overall health and strength of the Flathead economy.

As the CEDS is revised and adopted by Flathead County in future years, this Plan will adopt those findings, goals, and objectives to guide economic considerations for accessing and managing natural resources. For further information refer to Appendix A.

COMMUNITY STABILITY

Historically the custom and culture of Flathead County is a story retold in many western counties. The settlement of the County is a history of the logging and milling, farming and ranching, mining, trapping, fishing, hunting, wildlife, road building and railroads. It was led by hardy individuals willing to work and develop the resources of the land to bring forth a community. The settlement of the County is based on the beneficial use of land and water.

The people of Flathead County have traditionally earned their livelihood from activities associated with the County's abundant natural resources. The economy of the County was in the past, and is today, dependent on the availability and utilization of natural resources of the County. The economy of the Flathead has changed greatly since these times, but many people employed in Flathead County are dependent on forestry, forest production, ranching and farming, recreation, mining, and other activities related to the availability of natural resources. While some of these industries have competing interests in how the resources are used, they all have a stake in decisions about extraction, conservation and access to public lands.

Much of the land producing the resources critical to the economy of Flathead County is managed by Federal and State agencies, or is vitally affected by land management policies of federal or state agencies. The County economy benefits greatly from businesses operating on federal and state lands. These include timber harvesting, mining, livestock grazing, commercial recreational activities, and individual recreation opportunities.

In addition, there are service and support businesses that account for most of the job-related income in Flathead County. Many of these businesses are the base for economic stability of the County. The management and use of federal and state land plays a vital role in the social fabric and economic health of the County. 21.8 % of the land in the County is privately owned. The effective use of private land is greatly dependent on management style and technique for federal and state managed land and water.

Recognizing the critical tie between use of the federal and state lands and the economic stability of the county, the Board will work to provide a voice for individual citizens and local communities in guiding the future of the County.

For more information on the ongoing resource planning process, please refer to Appendix F.

CONSTITUTIONAL PRINCIPLES AND PRIVATE PROPERTY

The U.S. Constitution created a form of government characterized by:

1. Limited powers granted to the federal government.
2. Separation of those limited powers into legislative, judicial, and executive branches.
3. Creation of a process where the branches act to check and balance the power of the branches.

The Resource Committee, the Board and the people of Flathead County accept, support, and sustain the Constitutions of the United States and the State of Montana. The Constitution of the United States, Article 1, Section 8, clauses 17 and 18 limits the authority of the federal government to own only specified lands.

1. **GOAL:** That all lands in Flathead County be managed in coordination with the Board, its representatives, and thereby the citizens of this county.
2. **GOAL:** Reaffirm the fundamental rights of mankind as enumerated in the Declaration of Independence and acknowledge the limited nature of government as intended by the nation's founding fathers.
3. **GOAL:** Protect private property and private property rights and promote the continuation of private economic pursuits.

Objective 3A: Protect private property rights.

Objective 3B: Protect local custom and culture.

Objective 3C: Maintain traditional economic structures through self-determination.

Objective 3D: Open new economic opportunities through reliance on free markets.

Objective 3E: Enhance environmental quality.

Objective 3F: Protection and preservation of privately owned land is desirable in Flathead County. Recognize the limited private land base in Flathead County. When private property is purchased by the Government, the tax base is reduced. Property values of remaining supply are accelerated along with taxes on the increased values. Proposals for government purchase of property should be evaluated with the long term goal of no net increase in Government ownership of property and property rights in Flathead County.

4. **GOAL:** Ensure Due Process.

Objective 4A: Notice

Objective 4B: Opportunity to be heard.

Objective 4C: The right to cross-examination.

Objective 4D: Disclosure

Objective 4E: Findings of fact.

Objective 4F: Conflicts of interest and the appearance of conflict or impropriety.

Objective 4G: Prompt decisions.

Objective 4H: Records of proceedings.

Objective 4I: Ground rules for fair play.

Objective 4J: Substantive due process.

For more complete discussion of this topic please refer to "Due Process, the Elements of Fair Play" in Appendix G.

PRIMARY PLANNING GUIDELINES

The Board and the Flathead Natural Resource Committee recognize it is their duty and obligation to enter into official land use planning activities and to participate equitably and fully with the federal and state management agencies.

In accordance with state and federal laws regarding land use planning and protection of private property interests, the Board and the Flathead Natural Resource Committee seek to maintain and revitalize various multiple uses of state and federally managed lands. To that end, the Board adopts this Natural Resource Document, including General Planning Guidelines and Management Actions regarding various multiple uses of state and federally managed lands in the County.

The Flathead Natural Resource Committee and the Board have developed a process to coordinate in advance with the federal and state agencies regarding proposed actions which will alter or impact lands in Flathead County. This includes, but is not restricted to, private property rights and private property interests, economic stability and historically developed custom and culture of the county, the provisions of this Resource Use Plan and the Flathead County Growth Policy. Such agencies are requested, prior to taking official action or issuing a report on a proposed action, to coordinate with the Board. The agencies may accomplish this in part by providing the Board or its agents, in a timely manner, with the proposed purposes, objectives, and estimated economic impacts of such action.

The Board and the Flathead Natural Resource Committee are committed to a positive planning process with federal and state agencies. The County will consider the best interests of all people in Flathead County and the State of Montana regarding use of state and federal lands.

Flathead County is committed to seeing that all decisions on natural resources affecting the County will be guided by the following principles:

- + Maintain and revitalize the concept of multiple uses on all lands in Flathead County.
- + Protect private property rights and interests.
- + Protect local historical custom and culture.
- + Protect traditional economic structures in the County that form the base for economic stability.
- + Open up new economic opportunities through reliance on free markets.
- + Protect the rights to the enjoyment of the natural resources of the county by all citizens.

Resource and land use management decisions made in a coordinated manner by federal and state agencies and County officials will not only maintain and revitalize the multiple use of lands in Flathead County, but will enhance environmental quality.

This Plan is only the commencement of the planning process in Flathead County. The process itself is ongoing and will require the Flathead Natural Resource Committee and the Board to become involved with all stages of the resource process followed by federal and state agencies. These stages will include plan development, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation.

LAND TENURE, DISPOSITION, ACQUISITION AND USE

Only 21.8% of the land in Flathead County is private. It is this land that comprises the County tax base that must support most County services. The Board recognizes that land is essential to local industry and residents.

- 1. GOAL:** Land tenure adjustments for any government agency should provide for long term benefits to the community as a whole that can counter balance loss of private land, private property rights and interests or loss of property tax revenue to Flathead County.

Objective 1A: Exchanges of government land with private landowners to adjust property lines for improvement of management of either or both will be sought.

Objective 1B: Isolated tracts of state and federally managed lands, which could be better and more efficiently managed by the private sector, may be identified and recommended for sale or trade.

- 2. GOAL:** The design and development of all federal and state land dispositions and acquisitions, including land adjustments and exchanges, should be carried out to benefit the residents of Flathead County.

Objective 2A: That the County suffer no net loss in tax revenue.

Objective 2B: That private property interests are protected and enhanced.

Objective 2C: That the citizens of Flathead County will suffer no adverse aggregate economic impacts.

Objective 2D: That the general public and the Flathead County Board of Commissioners should be notified of, consulted with, and otherwise involved in all federal and state land adjustments in Flathead County, as discussed in Appendix H, Framework for Coordination.

Policy 1: The County should have the opportunity to investigate and evaluate all proposed changes to determine if the proposal is in the best interest of the County. Further, the County and other government agencies should collaborate and coordinate with each other in implementing proposed planning activities.

INTRODUCTION - WATER AND HYDROLOGY

The upper Flathead Basin encompassed by Flathead County (3.4 million acres) is 90% forested and mountainous. Less than 26% of the County is privately owned and most of the developable land lies in the central Flathead River valley with an area of 270,000 acres. The Flathead drainage has nearly 3,500 miles of streams and 450 lakes including Flathead Lake forming a very complex drainage system. The major rivers of Flathead County are the North, Middle, South Forks and Main stem of the Flathead River. Major tributaries of the Flathead River System are the Stillwater, and Whitefish Rivers. The Flathead and Swan rivers are the primary tributaries to Flathead Lake. The Flathead system at the head end of Flathead Lake contributes approximately 48% of the flow (approximately 9 million acre-feet into Flathead Lake annually) that exits Montana at the Idaho border. Flathead Lake is the largest natural body of fresh water west of the Mississippi River. Two dams are located on the Flathead River. Hungry Horse on the South Fork of the Flathead River and Kerr Dam, in Lake County, on the outlet of Flathead Lake are both developed to provide hydropower to the Pacific Northwest and recreation opportunities to the residents of Flathead County. Several smaller dams are located within the County, which were constructed primarily to provide irrigation water for agricultural operations within the County. A small dam is also located on the Swan River for hydropower generation.

The lakes and streams of Flathead County are generally low in nutrients and dissolved ions which results in high quality water. The headwaters of the majority of these waters are located in Forest Service wilderness or Park Service lands. The exclusion to development of these lands protects the high quality of the water. Once rivers and streams reach developed areas of the County they are susceptible to increased pollutant loads from point and non point sources, the severity of which is dependent on land management decisions.

The topography of the County ranges from extremely mountainous in the eastern and northern section to only moderately mountainous in the west-southwestern section. Approximately 80% of the total land area is classified as mountainous with slopes generally exceeding 40%. Elevations in the county range from more than 10,000 feet in Glacier National Park to approximately 2,900 feet along the shore of Flathead Lake. This variation in elevation and the associated geologic features result in a wide variation in climate. The county climate is classified as a modified Pacific maritime-type. It varies from a moist, maritime type climate in the upper Flathead River Valley to a drier, continental-type climate farther south. While the entire valley is affected by weather from the Pacific and Arctic Oceans, the dominant weather patterns vary from north to south. Pacific Ocean air is more dominant in the winter, resulting in a milder climate than would be characteristic of areas influenced by continental air masses.

The annual average temperature for Kalispell is 44 degrees F, and monthly averages are 20 degrees F and 66 degrees F for January and July, respectively. At Summit, located on the continental divide, the average annual temperature is 36 degrees F with January and July averages of 15 degrees F and 57 degrees F respectively.

Precipitation averages are generally higher in Flathead County than in other areas of Montana. Kalispell may be the driest point in the county with an average annual precipitation of 15 inches per year. At Summit, the average annual precipitation is 37 inches per year. In Glacier National Park and in the Swan Mountains, the average annual precipitation exceeds 100 inches per year on the upper areas of the Mountain ranges. Approximately 50 - 60% of the average annual precipitation in the county is snow. Precipitation increases from west to east across the County with peak average annual precipitation of approximately 30 inches in the Salish Range, 60 - 80 inches in the Whitefish Range. Much of the new development is occurring in the west side of the County which has the lowest precipitation of the County.

Soils in the relatively flat portion of Flathead County north of Flathead Lake consist of two broad types. One is rocky and poorly drained, and is underlain by unsorted glacial till. This is commonly used for timber production. The second general type soil is deep, well structured and well drained. It is underlain by deposits that have been reworked or sorted by running water and is the most productive in the County.

Annual run-off from the County's various drainage basins originates principally from precipitation in the mountainous portions of the watershed. Precipitation received in the lower river valleys is normally absorbed into the soil profile, and is generally not a major contributor to annual run-off. Rivers and streams contribute heavy run-off of snowmelt during the late spring and early summer. Low flows in the basin occur naturally during the winter

months, and floods normally occur in the spring during periods of rapid snowmelt. Flooding seems to generally correspond to rain-on-snow events in the late spring. Winter floods rarely reach substantial proportions. Significant

floodplain areas exist along most of the river courses in the County with the largest floodplains located in the valley. A number of major floods have occurred in Flathead County causing significant property damage.

Flathead County has major groundwater resources consisting of both artesian (confined) and unconfined aquifers. The greatest well yields are developed in gravel aquifers that are either confined or unconfined. The most productive aquifer in the county is an unconfined aquifer generally running from Columbia Falls to Kalispell along the Flathead River. It is also in direct communication with the Flathead River and supports various aquatic insects and plankton. A significant portion of new development within the County overlays this important aquifer and could impact its water quality.

Recharge to the aquifers is greatest from April through July due to stream runoff from accumulated winter snow in the surrounding mountains is augmented by an average of 3.76 inches of rain in May and June. Applied irrigation water and infiltration from the Flathead River during high stages are important sources of recharge to the alluvium during the spring and summer along the floodplains of the major rivers in the valley. Groundwater moves slowly through the aquifers and eventually either reaches streams to become base flow or is discharged by wells and springs or by evapotranspiration. The principle aquifers (confined) defined in the Flathead County are in the upper 600 feet of valley fill and are generally composed of glacier-related deposits of sand, gravel and clay. Overlying the main series of confined aquifers in the valley fill are several unconfined aquifers. Wells on the valley margins generally develop bedrock aquifers that depend on fractures for water storage. With exception of wells completed in or near fault zones, wells completed in limestone formations can yield up to 500 gpm while wells completed in the argillite formations typically yield less than 20 gpm.

Water resources are fundamental to the economic future and the quality of life in Flathead County. Historically, surface water sources were the primary supply and are still a primary source for irrigation, recreation and fisheries. In recent years, and for the foreseeable future groundwater sources are the primary source for new municipal, domestic, irrigation, and industrial supplies. The quality of this resource needs to be protected

1. GOAL: Productive watersheds must be maintained for water quantity and quality.

Objective 1A: Maintain healthy forests for productive watersheds.

Objective 1B: Develop water yield management plans for the forested lands within Flathead County.

Objective 1C: Support the Environmental Protection Agency/Montana Division of Environmental Quality's Total Maximum Daily Load Program's Beneficial Use and Water Quality Standards.

Objective 1D: Develop a County policy regarding the impacts of urban development on the site hydrology - specifically address centralized versus decentralized collection and treatment of waste water and storm water runoff.

Objective 1E: Copies of all reports prepared for public entities related to water quality and/or quantity shall be maintained at the County Library.

2. GOAL: Identify and secure water for future uses within the County.

Objective 2A: Develop a County plan for securing water for future uses.

Objective 2B: Develop a method for allocating the reserved water to future uses.

WATER RIGHTS

All existing rights to the use of any waters for any useful or beneficial purpose are recognized and confirmed by the Montana Constitution. "Existing water right" means a right to the use of water that would be protected under the law, as it existed prior to July 1, 1973. Flathead County recognizes that existing water rights exceed the average annual flow of the Flathead and Clark Fork Rivers.

- 1. GOAL:** Water rights established historically and beneficially used by the citizens of Flathead County including, but not limited to, the purposes of agriculture (irrigation and stock water) domestic use, industrial use, mining and power uses are recognized as private property rights and are to be protected as such.

Objective 1A: Any new or additional development of surface water or groundwater after June 30, 1973, will be consistent with Montana laws and the Montana Water Use Act of 1973.

- 2. GOAL:** Allocation of water resources in Flathead County are governed by applicable Montana Laws and the Prior Appropriation Doctrine.

Objective 2A: Any land use inventory, planning or management activities affecting water resources in Flathead County, either directly or indirectly, is coordinated with local government and is consistent with the Resource Use Management Plan of Flathead County.

Objective 2B: Use of water resources in Flathead County is consistent with local culture and community stability with particular emphasis on the economic stability of the community.

Objective 2C: Recognize that water used for recreation, fish and wildlife purposes provide economic benefit to Flathead County although these uses are not historically recognized as historic water rights or "existing water rights". These uses are generally non-consumptive uses of water and are dependent on maintained water quality.

Objective 2D: Encourage the completion of adjudication of water rights within the Flathead and Clark Fork River basins and participate in the process to insure availability of water for domestic and commercial use in the future

WATER QUALITY

- 1. GOAL:** The Montana Water Quality Act (Title 75, Chapter 5, Mont. Code Ann.) provides authority and standards for water quality in Flathead County.

Objective 1A: Any land use inventory, planning or management activities affecting point or non-point sources and water quality in Flathead County, either directly or indirectly, is coordinated through local government and is consistent with the Resource Use Management Plan of Flathead County.

Objective 1B: All management plans and land use practice modifications proposed by either state or federal agencies premised on water quality issues are coordinated through local government and are consistent with the protection of private property rights.

Objective 1C: The economic and social benefits of customary land use activities in Flathead County should be recognized but not advanced at the expense of water quality.

Objective 1D: The County shall develop and maintain a permitting coordination office so all permits for any project will be identified for the project proponent.

FLOODPLAINS AND RIVER TERRACES

Floodplains are relatively broad and smooth valley floors constructed by active rivers and periodically covered with floodwater during periods of overbank flow. Flood plains usually include the riparian and wetland areas. The floodplain is a part of the active erosional and depositional activity of river channels. They are zones of complex interaction between river water and groundwater. They contain the highest diversity of plants and animals and have the highest productivity of any other land type in the County. Intact floodplains are natural floodwater storage areas that allow spring floods to spread out and recharge alluvial aquifers, rejuvenate riparian forests and deposit fine sediment loads.

River terraces (benches) are abandoned floodplains that formed when their associated rivers flowed at high levels in the past. Many alluvium-filled valleys contain a complex series of river terraces that indicate ancient floodplains. Many of the river valleys in Flathead County have terraces at their margins which, when irrigated, are some of the most productive farmlands.

- 1. GOAL:** Continue to reduce property damage and improve stream stability, water quality and fisheries habitat in floodplains.

Objective 1A: Continue maintenance of beneficial floodplain protection structures as indicated by project approved by one or more agencies with appropriate jurisdiction such as U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Farm Service Agency, Mt. Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks, or Conservation Districts.

Objective 1B: Enhance upstream water retention and the use thereof through a combination of floodplain restoration projects and off stream storage.

Objective 1C: Develop accurate and detailed floodplain mapping in consultation with landowners. Maintain a current floodplain map reflecting all map amendments and bank stabilization projects.

Objective 1D: Discourage construction of any structure in floodplain areas and encourage flood proofing of existing structures situated in floodplain areas.

- 2. GOAL:** Protect river floodplain integrity

Objective 2A: Discourage channelization of rivers and streams

Objective 2B: Discourage use of bank stabilizing structures.

WETLANDS

Wetlands are defined as those areas that are inundated or saturated by surface or groundwater at a frequency and duration sufficient to support, and that under normal circumstances do support, a prevalence of vegetation typically adapted for life in saturated soil conditions. Wetlands generally include swamps, marshes, bogs, and similar areas.

Wetlands help regulate water levels within watersheds, improve water quality, reduce flood and storm damages, provide important fish and wildlife habitat, and support hunting, fishing, and other recreational activities. Wetlands are most common on floodplains along rivers and streams (riparian wetlands). They also occur in isolated depressions surrounded by dry land (for example, playas, basins, and "potholes") along the margins of lakes and ponds, and in other low-lying areas where the groundwater intercepts the soil surface or where precipitation sufficiently saturates the soil (vernal pools and bogs). Wetlands include marshes and wet meadows dominated by herbaceous plants; swamps dominated by shrubs, and wooded swamps dominated by trees. Wetland sites may provide critical habitat needs for many species, and they support a greater concentration of wildlife species, recreation and other activities than any other type location on the landscape.

1. GOAL: Develop a cooperative approach to wetland issues.

Objective 1A: Work with water and wildlife agencies, agriculture and landowners to achieve acceptable solutions and mutual benefits, both economic and otherwise, on these issues.

Objective 1B: Adopt existing wetlands definition.

Objective 1C: Develop a map of or wetlands of concern throughout the County.

Objective 1D: Promote compliance with federal and state laws regarding wetlands management in Flathead County.

Reference:

Federal Manual for Identifying and Delineating Jurisdictional Wetlands. 1989. Section 404 of the Clean Water Act.

RIPARIAN AREAS

Riparian areas can be defined as plant communities adjacent to and affected by surface or ground water of perennial or ephemeral water bodies such as rivers, streams, lakes, ponds, or drainage ways. These areas have distinctly different vegetation than adjacent areas or have species similar to surrounding areas that exhibit a more vigorous or robust growth form.

The high value of riparian areas is due to the abundance and variety of their natural resources and because they are tied directly to our most limited resource – water. Since water is a finite resource, mitigation can never fully recover loss of riparian areas to development. The more development occurs, and the greater our demand for water becomes, the more this will hold true. Enforcement of buffer strips and setbacks is needed to protect riparian areas from urban encroachment.

Overuse of riparian areas from livestock grazing and recreational use leads to soil compaction, bank erosion, increased sediment and nutrient loads, habitat loss and reduced productivity. There is a variety of land management tools that can offset such effects as fencing and off-channel watering and mineral licks, restrictions on off road vehicle use, seasonal closures, sanitation facilities, and hardened boat launches, etc. There is a variety of education and federal assistance programs to help landowners repair and protect riparian areas. The County government should ensure these resources are made available to landowners.

1. GOAL:

Objective 1A: Utilization allowances should be designed to enhance the range resource and provide an accurate and verifiable system for the comprehensive monitoring and evaluation of the entire range resource in a pasture or grazing rotation system. Utilization allowances and monitoring and evaluation systems should not make measure one area while excluding other areas of the range resource.

Objective 1B Encourage the development of riparian management plans in concert and coordination with landowners, ranchers and appropriate state and federal agencies.

Objective 1C: Adopt the United States Fish and Wildlife Service definition of riparian areas.

Objective 1D: Promote compliance with Federal and State laws regarding riparian management in Flathead County.

Objective 1E: Coordinate with other agencies and private entities managing land, waterways, and wetlands containing threatened or endangered species.

Objective 1F: The County should receive notification of all state, regional, interstate, and federal actions that have any impact on the water of the county prior to such actions being initiated. It shall be the policy of the county to comment on these actions where appropriate.

Objective 1G: Promote landowner education on best management practices and availability of programs on riparian and stream restoration.

Reference:

AGRICULTURE AND IRRIGATION

Agriculture in the lower elevations of Flathead County makes an important contribution to the economic base of the County, and is of critical importance to economic stability. Wheat, barley, flax, alfalfa, grain hays, silage, and livestock pasture constitute some of the major crops in Flathead County. Specialty crops such as seed potatoes, mint, lawn sod, canola, mustard, raspberries, strawberries, grapes and vegetable crops are also very important products. Further agricultural policies will be addressed in the 2006 Flathead County Growth Policy.

Many crops are enhanced by irrigation to increase productivity. Irrigation is from rivers and streams or from deep wells. Very little water is moved by irrigation ditches. Numerous wells are the result of artesian sources in the Flathead Valley. Irrigated crops are integral to production of livestock and feed, food sources for livestock and to the custom, culture, social, and the economic stability of the County.

Historically and to the present day, grain farms in Flathead County have contributed to the production and protection of wildlife and waterfowl by providing a food source at the expense of the agriculture community. The Flathead Valley is home to local populations and to migratory populations of waterfowl and other birds. Available water and wetland habitat plus the food sources are the necessary attraction.

- 1. GOAL:** Improve the climate for farming and ranching by providing a flexible menu of voluntary options for farmers to maintain the existing farm community.
- 2. GOAL:** Productive watersheds must be maintained and protected to assure adequate water supply for irrigation, agriculture and all life forms.

Objective 1A: Maintain healthy forests for productive watersheds.

- 3. GOAL:** Water rights and irrigation ditch easements are to be protected.

Objective 2A: Encourage that the re-adjudication process protects existing water rights.

- 4. GOAL:** Maintain water storage and conveyance structures.

LIVESTOCK GRAZING

Agriculture production in various forms in Flathead County is necessary to the livelihood and well being of all its citizens and to the land. The County must strive to protect our ranching and farming heritage and the vital natural resources needed to keep farming and ranching families in business.

The Flathead National Forest has lands contiguous to and intermingled with private lands of various ownerships in portion of Flathead County. The Flathead National Forest also manages and controls the headwaters and watersheds of the major rivers and streams in Flathead County which are necessary for agriculture to exist in the County. Historically, there have been permits issued by the land owners to ranchers for the purpose of grazing on federal and private lands.

- 1. GOAL:** Balance agricultural use on federal and state lands with recreational use, water quality and wildlife habitat.

Objective:1A: Retain the use of public lands contiguous to and intermingled with private lands.

Objective 1B: Recognize and protect private property rights.

Objective 1C: Support the agriculture industry.

Objective 1D: Provide better management of lands and land improvements on livestock range that is also key big game habitat.

Objective 1E: Support the tax base of the county.

Objective 1F: Utilize a coordinated resource management and planning approach to ensure involvement of all interests.

Objective 1G: Enhance and protect riparian areas.

Objective 1H: Encourage consistent management of wildlife populations.

In order to accomplish these goals and objectives, Flathead County proposes the following:

Policy 1: Use sound management practices and the develop innovative grazing plans.

Policy 2: Have in place, a rapid response process to address land resource issues.

Policy 3: Work cooperatively with the involved ranchers, and other interested parties to address resource concerns on a site-specific basis.

Policy 4: Use approved methods to control noxious weeds to maintain or increase grazing levels.

Policy 5: Maintain or increase forage available with structural improvements such as fences or cattle guards.

Policy 6: Use deferred entry or rest rotation along with structural improvements.

Policy 7: Protect riparian areas from overuse through fencing and off stream watering.

- 2. GOAL:** Manage grazing lands to maintain and enhance desired plant communities, and for the benefit of watersheds, wildlife, water quality, recreation and livestock grazing.

Objective 2A: Comply with the applicable federal and state laws, including the Range Lands Improvement Act.

Objective 2B: Encourage effective planning and management to maintain and enhance desired plant communities.

Policy 1: Encourage development of a management plan for each specific allotment.

Objective 2C: Encourage including all grazing improvements such as water development, noxious weed control, reseeding, fencing, salting plans, herding plans, and grazing systems in Allotment Management Plans, and allow for flexibility and opportunity to update the plan during the ten year period.

Objective 2D: Encourage utilization of standards and guidelines that are scientifically proven.

Objective 2E: Encourage decision-making regarding improvements which should be made on an allotment basis, because they are an integral part of the use of state and federal leases, private lands, other allotments, and the overall operation of each ranch enterprise.

Policy 2: Encourage compliance with the multiple-use concept mandated by statutes. No individual value will be given priority in vegetation management decisions. Congress has directed that the federally managed rangelands be managed, maintained and improved "so that they become as productive as feasible for all rangeland values." 43 U.S.C. - 1901 CO)(2). In order to carry out the Congressional intent it will be necessary that the Forest Service "inventory and identify current public rangeland and trends." 43 U.S.C. - 1901 CO)(1). All planning effort will adhere to the careful and considered consultation, coordination and cooperation requirements established by Federal statutes. See 43 U.S.C. - 1701; (a)(2)', - 1712 (c)(a); 1752 (d).

3. Goal: Encourage participation in meaningful coordination between Flathead County and federal, state agencies and large private land management entities.

Objective 3A: Encourage appropriate compliance with all federal and state statutes.

Objective 3B: Encourage county actions to preserve, support, and increase the county tax base.

Objective 3C: Develop and encourage programs to enhance the effectiveness of local government in the public land planning process for grazing.

Objective 3D: Allow for allotment management planning that will utilize a coordinated resource management and planning approach to ensure grazing on federal and state lands in the future.

Policy 1: Encourage mechanisms to allow subleasing of grazing rights or allotments on state or federal ground.

Policy 2: Encourage mechanisms to allow flexibility of grazing allotments or grazing lease agreements.

Goal 4: Enable the Flathead County Commissioners to take an active role by responding in writing to any allotment management plans. (AMP's).

Objective 4A: Ensure County participation and coordination on every agency decision affecting the county.

Objective 4B: Have written documentation recorded on behalf of the county showing the comments describing issues of importance to the county.

Objective 4C: Support the county tax base.

Objective 4D: Review federal and state agency plans and regulations to ensure they are consistent with the growth policy of Flathead County.

Objective 4E: Encourage creation of a grazing database that determines where the grazing permits are located in the county and show the condition of those areas.

Objective 4F: Develop programs to enhance the effectiveness of local governments in the public land planning process and promote good forest management, riparian management, and grazing management.

NOXIOUS WEEDS

Noxious weeds threaten Flathead County's economy and environment by "degrading the productivity and biological diversity of ecosystems" (Weed Management Task Force 2005). Weeds compete for resources, often crowd out native plants and threaten wildlife habitat and range land (USDA 2001). By 1994 spotted knapweed alone was estimated to have infested 40,000 acres in Flathead County (Flathead County 1994).

Flathead County has an aggressive weed control program in place, including a full-time County Weed Supervisor, a five-member County Weed Board, and a comprehensive County Weed Management Plan (Flathead County 1994). The County Weed Plan is in the process of being revised in accordance with the Montana Weed Management Plan, the purpose of which is to "strengthen, support and coordinate private, county, state and federal weed management efforts in the state, and promote implementation of ecologically based integrated weed management programs" (Weed Management Task Force 2005).

The Montana County Noxious Weed Control Act 7-22-21-1 through 7-22-2153 and rules 4.5201-4.5203 authorizes the Flathead County Weed District to enforce control of noxious weeds within the County, including state and private land and Bonneville Power Administration land. Glacier National Park has exclusive jurisdiction on all matters within its boundaries. Tribal government is responsible for land management within the Flathead Indian Reservation (Flathead County 1994).

Weed management on Flathead National Forest is directed through the National Forest Noxious Weed Management Policy FSM 2080-2083, the Invasive Species Strategic Plan (USDA 2004) and the Flathead National Forest Noxious and Invasive Weed Control Decision Notice (USDA 2001). The Flathead National Forest is in need of an overall weed management plan that would guide control as well as prevention and early detection. Because of the strong correlation between roads, off road vehicles and weeds (Gelbard and Belnap 2001) (Hodkinson and Thompson 1997) (Lacey et al. 1992) (Trunkle and Fay 1991), all access management decisions on the forest, large private holdings and state land should take weeds into account.

Glacier National Park is directed to control weeds by the Organic Act of 1916 as well as National Park Service Management Policies (USDI NPS 2000) which provide specific guidance for managing exotic plants, and the Exotic Vegetation Management Plan (USDI NPS 1991), a revision of which is due out later in 2005.

Because many noxious weeds thrive in disturbed soil, all County departments including Planning, Parks and Rec, Roads and Bridges and others must work to ensure that construction activity throughout the County be designed to minimize soil disturbance and provide for rapid plant cover once construction is complete. Weed control in Flathead County has been greatly facilitated by a strong cooperative relationship between the Weed Control District land management agencies and private land owners.

- 1. Goal:** Control and contain Category 2 and 3 noxious weeds on all ownerships within Flathead County and minimize the potential for any new infestations of Category 1 weeds that may become established and/or exist in the County, using Integrated Pest Management methodology.

Objective 1A: Support the Board of Commissioners as the weed authority for Flathead County.

Objective 1B: Encourage an increase to the County and other agencies' weed budgets and procure as much alternative funding as possible.

Objective 1C: Increase ongoing programs to educate the public, prevent spread, locate noxious weed populations, particularly new infestations and initiate control.

Objective 1D: Support, if necessary, legal actions to assure protection of all lands from noxious weeds.

Objective 1E: Encourage timely revision of the Flathead County and Glacier National Park weed management plans and urge Flathead National Forest to write a weed plan.

Objective 1F: Continue to strengthen cooperative relationships with all land management Agencies and land owners.

Objective 1G: Encourage use of appropriate plants in restoration of disturbed areas.

References Cited:

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MANAGEMENT OF VEGETATION

The Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA), The Taylor Grazing Act, the Rangelands Improvement Act, Multiple Use Sustained Yield Act and National Forest Management Act mandate maintenance and improvement on the federally managed lands to provide timber, water, recreation, forage and habitat for wildlife and fisheries. The Public Rangelands Improvement Act of 1978 states (43 U.S.C. - 1901) that: (federally managed lands were producing "less than their potential for livestock, wildlife habitat, recreation, forage, and water and soil conservation benefits."

Congress found that such conditions preventing an expansion of the forage resource and other unsatisfactory conditions on the public rangelands "may ultimately lead to unpredictable and undesirable long-term local and regional climatic and economic changes."

In order to eliminate such conditions Congress called for intensive planning and improvement of condition of the federally managed lands so that "they become as productive as feasible for all land values.

- 1. GOAL:** Work in conjunction with federal land managers (U.S. Forest Service) and encourage action on the intent of Federal Land Policy Act (FLPMA), the Taylor Grazing Act, the Rangelands Improvement Act, Multiple Use Sustained Yield Act, and National Forest Management Act.

Objective 1A: Identify areas of federal grazing permits on U.S. Forest Service lands intermingled with private lands for positive benefits of vegetation for wildlife and livestock.

Objective 1B: The Board will participate as needed in forest land management decisions.

FOREST MANAGEMENT

Active forest management on Flathead County lands must be based on sound science, economical decisions and common sense. Forest management practices must include planting, thinning and harvesting of the forest vegetation. Removal of merchantable forest products using economical mechanical and other harvesting systems will insure continued investment, employment and business opportunities in Flathead County. This harvest should result in a stable and sustainable volume of merchantable product being removed each year. The Flathead National Forest and the State of Montana Trust Lands have the capability under proactive management to achieve a healthy forest ecosystem while providing clean water, clean air, wildlife habitat, recreational opportunities and economic benefits and stability.

The Multiple-Use/Sustained Yield Act of 1960 and the National Forest Management Act of 1976 should be utilized to guide active forest management on Flathead National Forest. Lands should be managed and administered for water and watershed protection, recreation, timber harvest, wildlife, air quality and livestock grazing. These resources should be managed for current and future generation to use and enjoy.

Wood products is one of our basic industries and one of our only renewable resource. Wood provides food, clothing, heat and housing for our citizens as well as the basis for our local, state and national economy. The health of our families, communities, state and nation are dependent upon the active management of our forestland to ensure they are healthy and vibrant.

The Flathead National Forest encompasses 2,353,049 acres. These acres are further classified by the Forest Plan adopted in 1986 as 217,532 acres non-forest, 862,856 acres wilderness, 18,356 non-forest wilderness, 580,502 acres roadless recreation, and 673,803 acres suitable timber base. The suitable timber base acres has an inventory of merchantable sawlogs of 5.1 billion board feet (1,133,333 truck loads). The growth of these acres is 60,351,618 board feet per year (or 41 truckloads per day) and mortality is 52,775,719 board feet (or 36 truckloads per day).

There are 1,778,114 acres of the Flathead National Forest located within Flathead County.

During the period 1948 through 2003, (56 years), there have been approximately 192,429 acres harvested and 4,858,524,000 board feet removed. Current inventories on the suitable timber base exceed the total volume removed.

Healthy forest ecosystems require that the growth and mortality be managed. If this growth and mortality were harvested (133,127,377 Bd.Ft. or 77 truckloads/day) it could employ 215 sawmill workers and another 1500 associated workers. This equates to \$7.1 million in direct sawmill workers payroll and \$37.5 million to associated workers.

1. GOAL: Actively manage our forests to ensure a healthy and vibrant forest for current and future generations.

Objective 1A: Manage at a minimum for the harvest of growth and mortality.

Objective 1B: Maintain and restore watershed health through active management.

Objective 1C: Improve and restore wildlife habitat.

Objective 1D: Provide for the recreational needs in both roaded and unroaded areas.

Objective 1E: Aggressively promote early detection and control of insects and disease.

Objective 1F: Promote wildfire detection, control and full restoration of burned areas. Including maximum economical salvage of timber.

Policy 1: Utilize existing models in Flathead County on public and private land that demonstrate that active management can provide a forest that has clean air and water, provides quality wildlife habitat, recreational opportunities, provides fiber and meets the social and economic needs of the community.

- 2. Goal:** Through multiple use management, provide a sustainable and continuous supply of wood products, wildlife, fisheries and water.

Objective 2A: Minimize single use and single species management.

Objective 2B: Support active timber management on the designated suitable timber acres on the forest.

Objective 2C: Provide guidance and support to local managers on Forest decisions.

- 3. Goal:** Insure a stable output of products from the forest that utilizes the resources and provides for community stability.

Objective 3A: Provide known stable outputs so that the industry may make the necessary investments to fully utilize these outputs.

Objective 3B: At least 80% of Federal non-wilderness timberlands that is available and potentially suitable for timber management should be classed as suitable for sustained timber production to promote forest health, protection, and maintain sustained economic returns.

Objective 3C: On Federal lands suitable for timber harvest, a minimum average annual long-term harvest to capture the equivalent of 80% of the annual mortality shown by the most recent forest inventory is necessary to maintain and improve forest health, control hazardous fuel buildup, and support the local economy and local government (For Flathead NF, 28.6 MM cubic feet per year, or 286 MM cubic ft. for the plan period). The maximum allowable harvest level should be equal to the average annual gross growth per acre shown by the inventory applied to suitable timberland acres.

Objective 3D: There must be a reasonable level of Federal revenue sharing with local governments. No more than 20% of the sawtimber sale volume on a 5 year running average will be "Stewardship Contracts" where all the revenues are retained by the Forest Service and no revenue is shared with local government.

- 4. GOAL:** Provide for education of the public about the long term benefits of active management of our forests and the value to the community of this management.

Objective 4A: Utilize science and common sense to illustrate the benefits of active management.

Objective 4B: Educate public land managers, local school boards, County Commissioners, State officials and the public of the importance of a stable local infrastructure to carry out active management of the forest.

- 5. GOAL:** Actively involve the Congressional/Legislative delegation to ensure they are continually informed, updated and supportive of management of our forest resources.

Reference:

Flathead National Forest Records

Forest Resources of the Flathead National Forest. 1999. USDA. Rocky Mountain Research Station

Fire-Fuels Management

Since the 1930's and 40's, fuels management was increasingly addressed in relation to timber harvest on private, state, and federal lands. Laws and regulations were brought into effect that required reduction and disposal of what is referred to as slash (limbs, unmerchantable stems, and debris) left following logging activities. This was a common sense move in the practice of sound forestry principles and aided in the reforestation and perpetuation of the forests by reducing the fuel-fire hazard on private, state and federal lands.

From the 1950's to the early 1990's the National Forest lands within Flathead County saw timber harvest of approximately 160,000 acres of mature and immature timber stands. The resulting tonnages of fuels (slash & debris) prone to fire were disposed of. The harvesting of timber stands created a mosaic in the forests that eventually regenerated into young vigorous stands that are less susceptible to fast moving wildfires as fire-fuels had been reduced. These areas serve as barriers to wildfire and serve as control barriers to surrounding maturing forest stands. In addition, a network of forest access roads served as access and aided as wildfire control lines.

Beginning in the early 1990's, forest management by harvesting, regeneration, and thinning of timber stands was significantly reduced on the National Forest Lands in Flathead County. This was due to laws, regulations and litigation. The establishment of the Northern Continental Divide Grizzly Bear Recovery Program resulted in a substantial reduction in forest road access. These restrictions have affected management ability to deal with fire-fuel loading and have also affected the custom, culture, social and economic situation in Flathead County. (See Appendix E for declining trends in timber harvest and revenue)

The suitable timber base acreage on the FNF is 673,803 acres of the 2,353,049 acre forest. The current forest annual growth is 60 million board feet on the 673,803 acre timber base. The annual mortality is 53 million board feet on the timber base for a total of 113 million of growth and mortality annually. The annual allowable sale quantity is 52 million. The average cut on the FNF in the previous five years is 13 million. The allowable sale quantity has never equaled the annual mortality rate. Without the annual removal of the 52 million of ASQ for the FNF, the buildup of fire fuels leads to catastrophic fire conditions that have been evident in the last five years.

The trend has been compounded by moderate to severe drought and the onset of disease and insect infestations of epidemic proportions throughout Flathead County and which is prevalent in the Rocky Mountain Region and Pacific Northwest. Many timber stands are dead and dying, creating fire-fuel conditions in tonnage that has not existed since the early settlement years. These events and conditions have lead to large catastrophic fires consuming thousands of acres in individual uncontrollable wildfire events.

The declining trends on National Forest Lands within Flathead County have shifted the demand for timber onto private lands. It has also forced the closure of many timber processing mills, a reduction of forest products and supporting industry jobs. This has resulted in the loss to the economy and revenue to all government agencies thereby increasing the economic burden on the County.

Private timberlands within Flathead County are experiencing the effects of lack of timber harvest on National Forest and are filling the demand for timber. Good stewardship of the private timberlands is being demonstrated as fire-fuels are being reduced and regeneration of timber stands is occurring. The results are an asset to the economy.

- 1. GOAL:** Coordinate with the Flathead National Forest in implementation of the National Fire Plan Strategy to strive to achieve fire-fuels reduction to acceptable standards on all private and public lands contiguous to private lands.

Objective 1A: Promote the use of residual forest fuels as alternative power sources.

Objective 1B: Encourage the National Forests and State Forests to practice acceptable forest stewardship to benefit the citizens, lands, waters and wildlife.

Objective 1C: Cooperate with the Forest Service to help assess the condition of the National Forests in Flathead County.

Objective 1D: Federal timber harvests will be planned in coordination with local governments using the best available science (such as BEHAVE II fire models) to evaluate effectiveness of planned treatments. First

priority is for Federal Lands that are classed moderate to high existing fire hazard fuels adjacent to all private and/or State lands must be treated to create effective strategic fuel breaks to protect public health and safety. Treatments must not be limited to precommercial thinning and underburning but must include opening commercial timber stand crowns to provide a crown fire resistant stand structure as recommended by Fiedler, Carl, et. al., 2001. A Strategic Assessment of Fire Hazard in Montana. University of Montana, School of Forestry, September 29, 2001. Highest priority will be given to treat all area adjacent to wildland urban interface areas by 2015. Drainages with continuous high/medium hazard fuels will have interior strategic fuel breaks planned and implemented by 2020 that will provide opportunities to control fires before they reach urban interface areas.

FIRE MANAGEMENT

In Flathead County, fire suppression has always been and will be guided by the need to achieve the highest level of protection for human safety and private property on the County lands protected by local fire districts. Prevention is an integral goal of fire districts and within their respective departments.

Flathead County Fire Districts (departments & substations) routinely respond, and, in many incidents, perform initial attack and/or assist in fire suppression on timber lands both on State of Montana (DNRC) and federally (U.S. Forest Service) protected lands within Flathead County, for the protection of private lands and structures.

Federal and State employees have served as rural fire department members throughout Flathead County Fire Districts providing for interaction and cooperation between agencies.

- 1. GOAL:** Encourage continued cooperation, qualification training, and assistance between Flathead County Fire Districts (Departments) and State and Federal Agencies within Flathead County.

Objective 1A: Continue and strengthen coordination and cooperation, and encourage Federal and State wildland fire presuppression and rapid suppression in wildland-urban interface areas or deeper areas within the national forest and park that pose a threat to private lands outside the national forest boundaries in Flathead County. Rapid response fire suppression actions must be imperative at all times, especially in periods of high fire danger.

Objective 2A: Work with the Flathead National Forest to prioritize fire-fuel hazard reduction projects near the borders of the National Forest lands and County lands and general execution of the National Fire Plan Strategy.

Objective 3A: Encourage the Flathead National Forest to annually remove on the suitable timber base by harvesting an amount of timber equal to the annual growth rate and the mortality rate, including annual mortality by epidemic insect and disease, to reduce the effects of catastrophic wildfires.

Objective 4A: Discourage the Forest Service and National Park "Let Burn" policy on all forested lands outside of designated wilderness areas. Strong consideration to "let burn" wilderness fires should be curtailed if near wilderness boundaries during periods of high fire danger and which have the potential to threaten bordering federal and private lands.

Objective 5A: Encourage prescription burning only during periods of moderate fire danger and not during normal fire season conditions. Special consideration should be given to private lands within or bordering federal and state lands.

Objective 6A: Encourage a return to a previous policy of controlling wildfires by 10 a.m. the day following discovery.

Objective 7A: Encourage use of night crews on wildfires.

Objective 8A: Develop a Community Fire Plan and a Watershed Management Plan to help to protect local communities.

ENERGY

Flathead County, with its geographic location, is one of the strategic sources to the Columbia River System. The Flathead River with its three forks, North Fork, Middle Fork and South Fork is intrinsic to this system. The Hungry Horse Dam is on the South Fork of the Flathead River about twenty miles northeast of Kalispell and approximately 5 miles southeast of the South Fork's confluence with the main stem of the Flathead River. The Hungry Horse project is reservoir, power plant and switchyard. The project has played an important role for meeting the growing need for power as well as flood control, recreation and downstream power system benefits. The dam is maintained and operated by the Bureau of Reclamation

The 564-foot high dam is a concrete arch structure with a reservoir capacity of 3,468,000 acre-feet. The generator capacity of the total plant is 428,000 kilowatts achievable through for each, 107,000 kilowatt generators. In 1995 a selective withdrawal system was installed on all four unit penstock intakes for use from the first of June to the end of October to increase water discharge temperature to reduce thermal shock for downstream fisheries and increasing aquatic insect communities for bull trout growth and reproduction.

In the Pacific Northwest the Bonneville Power Administration operates a large portion of the high voltage, long-distance transmission lines which extend into Flathead County. This federal agency markets the power produced by federal base system resources and resources acquired under the provisions of the Northwest Power Act of 1980. Bonneville sells power to public and private utilities, direct service industrial customers and various public agencies. Of interest to Flathead County, the Columbia Falls aluminum plant utilizes considerable power. Should the plant cease operation, significant impacts would result to the County. A small hydroelectric plant operates on the Swan River in Bigfork. The plant is operated by Pacific Corp.

Flathead County is served by the Flathead Electric Cooperative, Inc., of Kalispell. This electric utility company serves Flathead County along with a customer base in Lake, Lincoln, and Sanders Counties. This company serves 56,243 meter locations through 3,695 miles of power lines. It is a resale utility being supplied power from BPA, Pacific Corp and Basin Electric. The resale KWH sold is 1,287,769,586.

Northwestern Energy is the natural gas service provider in Flathead County. Northwestern Energy has approximately 24,000 customers receiving natural gas transmission and distribution delivery services. None of the natural gas delivered on this system originates in the County. The entire commodity is moved into the valley through transmission pipelines from sources outside the County. Northwestern Energy continuously monitors system capacity and manages system improvements to assure availability of safe, reliable capacity for system users.

Any large projects, such as natural gas generation plants, would be outside the scope of this growth management activity. Northwestern Energy would welcome the opportunity to be involved in such activity within parameters of sound economic and financial investment decision making. Northwestern Energy is committed to providing safe, reliable natural gas distribution and transmission services to Flathead County consumers. Continued access to public rights-of-way corridors is important to assure continued availability at economically affordable rates.

1. **GOAL:** Encourage appropriate energy resource exploration and development.

Objective 1A: Encourage elimination of unreasonable or unfounded barriers, Prohibitions and impediments to energy resource and development

Objective 1B: Support the retention of existing energy operations consistent with sound economic and environmental practices.

Objective 1C: Support large and small scale energy resource exploration consistent with sound economic and environmental practices.

MINERAL RESOURCES

Many and mineral resources occur on both private and government-owned lands within Flathead County. These resources have great economic potential for the citizens of the County. At the beginning of the 1900's coal and oil exploration with mining and drilling occurred in the North Fork of the Flathead and in adjoining Canada which contains the headwaters of the North Fork of the Flathead River. There are remnants of mining claims and the Hog Heaven Mine in Flathead County in which copper ore was mined.

Mining, mining claims and prospecting took place in the late 1800's and early 1900's and are referred to in "Trails of the Past: Historic Overview of the Flathead Forest, Montana, 1800-1960" by Kathryn L. McKay. Within the Flathead National Forest in Flathead County there are numerous drainages, creeks, mountain peaks and other geographic features that have been named for early day prospectors and miners.

Currently mining in Flathead County is primarily limited to sand, gravel and rock. Various types of gravel are in demand for road construction. Round rock is used for concrete and asphalt road construction and decorative purposes. Crushed rock is used for fill and road surfaces. The demand for such materials increases as the population and development of the County increases and existing surfaced roads deteriorate. The demand for large fractured and round rock for decorative purposes has increased dramatically in the County in recent years, evidenced by retail yards and a continuous movement by transport on the local highways. Much is sold out of Flathead County. Recreational mining by gold panning exists in limited fashion in Flathead County.

The forests on private and public lands currently contain millions of tons of wood fiber. On the National Forest large amounts of wood fiber are becoming unfit for manufacturing wood products due to lack of access. Normal tree mortality, insect and disease of epidemic proportions are a continuing process. The unfit wood product could be used as fuel for co-generation of electrical power and heat as opposed to incineration by catastrophic wildfires. Such uncontrolled wildfires release excessive carbon-laden ash and smoke into the atmosphere, contributing to the greenhouse gas affect as well as to pollution of lakes and streams, causing a detrimental health and safety factors to human health and well being.

Flathead County recognizes that the development of its abundant mineral resources is desirable and necessary to its economic well being. Utilization of biomass from public forests would reduce fire-fuels to acceptable standards, lessen the risk of catastrophic wildfires and provide an economic boost for the County, state, and nation. Energy and mineral resource extraction is consistent with the local history, custom and culture. The following are the policies of Flathead County.

1. GOAL: Encourage appropriate mineral resource exploration and development.

Objective 1A: Encourage elimination of unreasonable or unfounded barriers, prohibitions, and impediments to mineral resource and development.

Objective 1B: Support the retention of existing mineral operations consistent with sound economic and environmental practices.

Objective 1C: Support large and small-scale mineral resource exploration consistent with sound economic and environmental practices.

2. GOAL: Ensure compliance with all existing state and federal laws regarding oil, gas, and mineral exploration and/or their production.

Objective 2A: Carefully evaluate proposed revisions of the General Mining Law of 1872 for undue adverse impact on the mining industry in the County.

Policy 1: The County will make recommendations regarding any proposed revisions to the General Mining Law of 1872 to the appropriate State and Federal representatives in order to influence the outcome to favor the custom, culture, and economy of Flathead County.

Objective 2B: Mineral resource exploration and development are among historic multiple uses on state and federally managed land. Their continuance is compatible with the multiple-use principle.

ROADS: ACCESS AND TRANSPORTATION

It is the policy of Flathead County to assist in the development and maintenance of a transportation plan that prioritizes an access management network across all federal and state managed lands within the County. Since the mid 1990's access into and across National Forest and State Lands has been greatly reduced due to the grizzly bear road density standards established by the Flathead National Forest, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Dept. of Interior, and by litigation. This has resulted in forest transportation system (roads) obliteration which is permanent, year long and seasonal closures.

This action has resulted in a loss of the timber base and forest management on the Flathead National Forest by the lack of access. Other results include the loss of motorized recreational use for camping, hiking, sightseeing, and the Flathead National Forests failure to actively manage the public lands for social and economic benefits. Another effect is loss of rapid response for wildfire suppression.

Insects and disease are in epidemic stages in the National Forest and are being ignored adding unacceptable fire-fuel loadings of dead timber resulting in catastrophic fires and devastation to watersheds, wildlife and wildlife habitat. Destroyed roads add to a diminished human safety factor such as escape routes from wildfires and loss of time in responding to human accidents.

1. GOAL: Maintain the historic right to travel over federal and state lands wherever necessary in pursuit of farming, ranching, timber harvest, mining, recreational activities, motorized vehicle use, historic uses, human safety and emergency (wildfire) egress.

Objective 1A: Support the economy with historic and traditional uses of the county and road systems of the County, federal and state lands.

Objective 1B: Keep rights of way going to and inside public lands open for economic-social purposes and for the enjoyment of all the public.

Objective 1C: Identify mechanisms to help maintain the uses of roads.

Objective 1D: Enhance the opportunities for further economic development.

Objective 1E: Encourage federal and state agencies to maintain forest roads over the Whitefish Divide and Crane Mountain for fire emergencies, human safety, recreation and forest management purposes.

Objective 1F: Control the spread of noxious weeds.

Objective 1G: Maintain open spaces.

Objective 1H: Protect the environment.

Objective 1I: Encourage adoption of rules controlling off road recreational use of four wheelers and other OHV's while providing areas for this form of recreation.

2. GOAL: Protect private property rights in the County.

Objective 2A: Access to and/or across federal and state managed lands within the County should not entail encumbrances or restrictions on private property rights.

3. GOAL: Flathead County will cooperate in a coordinated approach to the issues of roads and rights of ways with state and federal agencies.

Objective 3A: The prevailing federal law with respect to roads and rights-of-way is RS 2477 (the Act of July 26, 1866) which states in Section 8: "The right of way for the construction of highways over public lands, not reserved for public uses, is hereby granted.

Objective 3B: Federal statute defines federal land right-of-way as follows: Any road, trail, access or way upon which construction has been carried out to the standard in which public rights-of-way were built within historic context. These rights-of-ways may include, but not be limited to, horse paths, cattle trails, irrigation canals, waterway, ditches, pipelines or other means of water transmission and their attendant access for maintenance, wagon roads, jeep trails, logging roads, homestead roads, mine to market roads, and all others.

Objective 3C: Road closures and obliterations in the County will not occur where there may be possible RS 2477 rights-of-way, without meaningful coordination and concurrence between Flathead County, local interested parties, and relevant federal and state land management agencies.

4. **GOAL:** Flathead County, in coordination with federal agencies and state land management agencies, will continue to develop a complete inventory of all roads and rights-of-way in Flathead County.

Objective 4A: Inventory will include, but is not limited to, a database, maps, GIS locations and photographs.

For more information regarding public opinion of roads, please refer to Appendix 1.

5. **GOAL:** Permanent vehicular access to major non-wilderness forested watersheds is necessary to promote public health, safety, and general welfare through economically and ecologically sustainable management of forest health and fire hazard buildup. No existing public transportation system roads should be decommissioned unless there is demonstrated public support that the road is not needed for public recreation or for economically efficient management and protection purposes.

Objective 5 A: The transportation system will be managed as necessary to provide for wildlife security and prevent damage to soil, water, and the road surface. Wildlife security will be provided primarily through seasonal closures as recommended by Mace and Waller, 1997, Final Report Grizzly Bear Ecology In the Swan Mountains Montana, page 73, and by Jim Williams, Manager Region One Fish Wildlife and Parks (in consultation with Thier, Mace, and Manley), Moose Fire Post Project recommendations, September 12, 2002.

Objective 5 B: Gates will be used to implement closures on all system roads so that the road may be opened quickly with no ground disturbance for emergency access or forest management and recreation activities.

ROADLESS LANDS

Roadless lands are a component of the custom and culture of the people of Flathead County. Roadless lands represent remnants of our wilderness heritage. Some of these lands retain high wilderness character. Others provide a buffer between developed lands and wilderness. (See Appendix I & L for history of Roadless Lands).

Roadless areas are a part of healthy watersheds and provide clean water for community use, fish and wildlife habitat. These lands also provide opportunities for public recreation. They may affect management of adjoining lands.

The National Fire Plan indicates that fires are almost twice as likely to occur in roaded areas as in roadless areas, because roadless areas are generally further away from communities and sources of human-caused ignitions. The report titled "Protecting People and Sustaining Resources in Fire Adapted Ecosystems-- A Cohesive Strategy" (65 Fed. Reg. 67480) advocates a higher priority for fuel reduction on land that is near communities and readily accessible municipal watersheds.

In Flathead County the current Forest Plan shows Roadless Lands account for 495,430 acres of the Flathead National Forest. This represents 21 percent of the Flathead Forest. Almost all roadless lands are outside of the designated timber base. These roadless lands include both non-motorized and motorized areas.

Flathead County encourages the management of U.S. Forest Service roadless land to achieve the following goals:

1. **GOAL:** To protect clean and abundant water sources for the needs of the citizens of Flathead County (potable water, agriculture, and recreation), and the diverse needs of fish and wildlife.
2. **GOAL:** To protect wildlife habitat and other natural resource values inherent in roadless lands.
3. **GOAL:** To provide an array of recreational opportunities consistent with maintaining clean water, wildlife habitat and populations, and including non-motorized and motorized access.
4. **GOAL:** To support the further delineation of roadless lands as appropriate through the forest planning process.

GLACIER NATIONAL PARK

Glacier Park is an historic and highly scenic region of Northwestern Montana. The Continental Divide traverses the Park from north to south. The 1,013,594 acres in the park are divided approximately in half between Flathead and Glacier Counties with 614,736 acres in Flathead County. Within the park are 783 acres of private land held by in holders, acquired prior to park designation. The Park is bordered on the west by Flathead County's North Fork River and Flathead National Forest and is easily accessible through the Gateway communities of the Flathead Valley. On the south and southwest it is bordered by Flathead Forest and the Great Bear Wilderness leading into the Bob Marshall Wilderness. Ninety-five percent of Glacier Park is "proposed" Wilderness which would fall under NPS policy as designated wilderness.

The mountains of the Continental Divide constitute a fault-block range. Faulting of the earth's crust along the eastern slope has resulted in rock of ancient origin being forced eastward for 15 miles on rock of a later geologic period, a formation referred to as the Lewis overthrust. Within the Park lakes, cirques and U-shaped valleys all show the effect of glacial action that took place during a more recent period, when the region was covered by an ice sheet hundreds of feet thick. A few remnants of the glaciers still cling to the higher peaks.

The lowest elevation in the Park is at West Glacier, 3,219 feet and the highest is Mt. Cleveland at 10,466 feet. Logan Pass is at 6,646 feet with mountains rising above on all sides.

Rainfall is heaviest west of the Continental Divide, so forest growth is more luxuriant there in Flathead County. Characteristic trees are western red cedar, hemlock, larch, white birch, lowland white fir and western white and ponderosa pine. East of the divide, in adjoining Glacier County, lodgepole pine and Engelmann spruce predominate, while Douglas fir occurs on both sides. At high elevations, groups of limber pine, whitebark pine and alpine fir grow in meadows with abundant wild flowers.

The White Mountain goat attracts the attention of visitors by its ability to traverse sheer cliffs. Other mammals are black and grizzly bear, bighorn sheep, mountain lion, coyote, elk, moose and deer. Some of the park's birds are Rocky Mountain jay, water ouzel, Clark's nutcracker, white-tailed ptarmigan and grouse.

Archaeological surveys have found evidence of human use dating back over 10,000 years. These people may have been ancestors of tribes that live in the area today. By the time the first European explorers came to this region, several different tribes inhabited the area. The Blackfeet Indians controlled the vast prairies east of the mountains. The Salish and Kootenai Indians lived and hunted in the western valleys. They also traveled east of the mountains to hunt buffalo.

In the early 1800's French, English and Spanish trappers came in search of beaver. In 1806, the Lewis and Clark Expedition came within 50 miles of the area that is now the park. As people moving west increased, the Indian tribes were forced to surrounding lands but the park region still holds spiritual value for them. The Great Northern railway over Marias Pass was completed in 1891. Under pressure from miners, the mountains east of the Continental Divide were acquired in 1895 from the Blackfeet. Abandoned mine shafts are still found in several places in the park.

By the late 1890's tourists seeking the scenic beauty resulted in facilities to springing up. Stagecoaches brought people to Lake McDonald where a boat allowed travel into the wilderness. The construction of the Going-to-the-Sun Road was a huge undertaking. Visitors to the park marvel at how such a road could have been built. The final section of the road over Logan Pass, was completed in 1932 after 11 years of work and is considered an engineering feat.

In 1900 George Grinnell first declared the area a forest preserve open to mining and homesteading. However, Grinnell sought the added protection of a national park. His efforts were rewarded on May 11, 1910 when President Taft signed a bill establishing Glacier as the 10th national park. In 1932 the United States and Canada governments voted to designate the parks as Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park, the world's first. Both parks were declared International Biosphere Reserves in 1975, and in 1995 the parks received another international designation as a World Heritage Site. The park is part of an ecosystem that is roughly 7-10 times the size of the park alone and is being called The Crown of the Continent, a title given it by George Grinnell in 1901. The Park contains 350 structures listed in the National Register of Historic sites and six National Historic Landmarks, one of which is the Going-to-the-Sun road, one of the most scenic in North America.

The highway between West Glacier and St. Mary is open June to October. This provides transportation by auto and “jammer” busses to traverse the 55-mile drive crossing the Continental Divide at Logan Pass and to reach the inns, lodges and mountain chalets. There are also approximately 1,000 campsites available with nearly a thousand miles of trails leading deep into Glacier's back country and accessing its more than 200 lakes.

The Park is a major attraction and source of enjoyment for out-of-state visitors as well as Montana residents. A wide assortment of recreation and entertainment activities are provided by resources within the Park and adjoining private properties such as wild rivers, pristine lakes, hiking trails, forests, wildlife, historic sites, golf courses, resorts, dude ranches and airports. These contribute greatly to the overall economy of Flathead County.

Gross revenues for fiscal year 2004 ending in September show \$3.3 million from camping and entrance fees and additional revenue from concessionaires, primarily inns and boat tours.

Through a recent federal policy change national parks are now able to retain 80% of revenues generated with the remainder going to the Federal government. However, additional funding by Congressional appropriation, is required to provide for major upkeep and special projects such as the upcoming Going-to-the-Sun road reconstruction.

For information on visitation by year and month from 1995-2003 see References: Park Visitation Report or <http://www2.nature.nps.gov/NPstats/dspPark.cfm>

Summary of Glacier Park Management Plan, June 2004

COMMERCIAL SERVICES PLAN

Commercial services are provided by private businesses, operating under contracts and managed by the National Park Service. These businesses perform a vital role in meeting the mission of the park and providing appropriate services that the Park Services could not realistically furnish. The comprehensive 2004 plan itemizes appropriate services and provides direction for new concession contracts and other commercial authorizations for the next 20 years.

The guiding philosophy is to manage most of the park for its wild character and unique natural heritage. Visitor use is managed to preserve resources, but provide experience, study and enjoyment of the park and celebrate peace, friendship and goodwill among nations. One of the considerations in the 2004 plan is to support visitation levels that are consistent with preservation of resources and a high quality of visitor experience, as opposed to serving the maximum possible number of visitors.

The aging infra-structure has for years deteriorated and requires major capital expenditures to preserve and maintain such traditional services as grand historic hotel lodging and family accommodations. The management plan recommends a minimum of 500 guestrooms park wide including lodging on private lands. The intent is to implement rehabilitation of facilities and begin construction as funding becomes available and where sufficient review of impact has occurred. Plans are also underway for rehabilitation of "Going to the Sun Road" and pursuing funds for the project.

A variety of approaches and requests for transportation was addressed through public comment, including shuttle and taxi service from gateway communities and public transportation within the park. Traditional boat tours, rentals, camping and hiking provisions will continue. Also considered were requests for such services as guided horseback riding, bicycle and motorcycle group tours, cross-country skiing and snowshoeing, and guided vehicle tours or step-on guides for private vehicles. Economic opportunities for tribes and private lands within the park are given consideration. For a complete listing of park services refer to Park Planning Documents:
<http://www.nps.gov/glac/home.htm>

PARK RESEARCH

Natural Resource Challenge Report FY2003

Crown of the Continent Research Training Center

Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park

The Crown of the Continent Research Learning Center is in a converted Mission 66 House in Glacier National Park headquarters area. It has a multi media conference/presentation room, state of the art computer lab for research, education and activities facilities, and residences for scientists, students and collaborators. Staffing started in 2003.

The mission is to initiate and facilitate learning and scientific inquiry in and about the Crown of the Continent ecosystem so that communities both regional and global can make informed decisions as stewards of the region's vast repositories of cultural and natural resources. Goals and Projects can be reviewed on website:
www.nps.gov/glac/home.htm <<http://www.nps.gov/glac/home.htm>>

OFFICE OF INTERPRETATION AND EDUCATION:

Interpretation is the process of telling the park's story under six categories including international themes, history, ecology, mountains and glaciers, etc. Joint projects of an international nature coordinate with the Canadian Waterton Peace park. The new Crown of the Continent Research Center will be used as a resource for information and programs.

Glacier Park maintains a partnership with four cooperative organizations under a memorandum of understanding which provides services on a volunteer or non-profit basis for the park.

Glacier Fund is a national park foundation with an agreement with the National Park Service that performs fund raising and provides grants for a variety of projects such as providing bear proof storage lockers for campsites and developing board walks for visitors.

Glacier Natural History Assn. handles book sales in the visitor centers and provides education authorized by Congress. Their charter is to further education and research goals such as archival studies, interpretation programs and student activities.

The Glacier Institute is an education partner operating under a memorandum of understanding to make available educational seminars for the public to provide a wide variety self-funding programs on a fee basis for participants. Glacier National Park Associates raise some money for summer staff, but also perform volunteer work on trail maintenance and construction, woodworking, re-roofing, etc.

INNHOLDERS:

Over the years since 1910 when the region was declared a park, thousands of acres of privately owned land have been purchased by the Park. Private property still exists within the park boundaries, much of which had been acquired through homesteading in the early days prior to 1910. There are currently approximately 80 landowners holding some 100 parcels with a total of about 380 acres. Most of this is along McDonald Lake with a few in the Big Prairie area near Polebridge and Kintla Lake. Lands are held in fee title and may be passed on to heirs or sold with the Park retaining no first right of refusal. About ten acres around Lake McDonald owned by the Park was provided two types of term agreements. Still in effect are about ten acres of land which had been purchased under life estate agreement which allowed present owners to continue using it, maintaining it and paying taxes during their lifetime, after which time it goes to the Park. The second form of agreement involved a 25 year lease negotiated in the 70's and has now expired.

FIRE MANAGEMENT PLAN, Glacier National Park, West Glacier, MT

The Federal Directors order, RM-18, November 17, 1998 required all parks, with vegetation capable of burning, to prepare a Fire Management Plan. The updated long-range Wildlands Fire Management Plan for Glacier National Park, released in March of 2003, provided direction to a program that uses fire to achieve desired resource conditions within the park while protecting park resources and those of adjoining lands. The Glacier Park and the Flathead National Forest Fire Management Plan are available for review on [www.http://nps.gov/glac/home.htm](http://nps.gov/glac/home.htm).

It shows a drop in park visitation during the severe fires of the summer of 2001 to be 42,674 and in the summer of 2003 to be 291,334 versus the prior years. (See Appendix F: Visitor Statistics).

1. GOAL: Retain high levels of enjoyment for the general public at all income levels consistent with historical designated uses of such federally designated lands.

Objective 1A: Encourage affordable access to the Park with a variety of transportation alternatives.

Objective 1B: Encourage continuance of access to park amenities such as strategically located picnic areas, campsites hiking trails and educational resources.

Objective 1C: Encourage high standards of health and safety provisions for all visitors.

2. GOAL: Encourage County participation in meaningful coordination between Glacier National Park and private enterprise operators to meet the needs of park visitors.

Objective 2A: Encourage management policies that facilitate adequate financing and maintenance of needed park facilities designed to enhance maximum enjoyment by visitors.

Objective 2B: Encourage management policies that address the problem of growing traffic and parking demands.

Objective 2C: Explore alternative means of coordinating gateway community services, transportation and parking provisions with those of the Park.

3. GOAL: Encourage successful cooperation and coordination with Glacier National Park in efforts related to wildlife management.

Objective 3A: Explore approaches to develop unified fuel reduction efforts on lands bordering private and park property.

Objective 3B: Work out cooperatively details concerning fire management and fire fighting on bordering lands.

4. GOAL: Encourage cooperation and economic support of private industry in the use and enjoyment of Glacier Park amenities.

Objective 4A: Support gateway businesses while assuring within reason, tasteful facilities and businesses that compliment the theme and mission of the Park.

Objective 4B: Work with the park administration to protect within reason the interests of private property owners within the Park while maintaining park esthetics and decor.

TOURISM

Tourism is a growing industry in Flathead County that is highly resource related with a 20.6% 10-year increase from 1993 to 2003. In 2001-2002 a survey of 4,595 non-residents was conducted by the Montana Institute for Tourism & Recreation Research of the University of Montana to provide Flathead County Visitor Characteristics. It revealed that 75% of visitors were attracted here by Glacier National Park. Rating high on the scale were the mountains, rivers, lakes, open space, wildlife, hiking, skiing, golfing and camping opportunities. These attractions, plus visits to friends and relatives living here, have attracted visitors from throughout this country and internationally.

Of expenditures in Flathead County by this surveyed group of nonresidents, 45% went for food and lodging, 26% for retail purchases and 16% for gas. Out of an average of 6.8 nights spent in Montana, a total of 13% of visitors spent at least one night in Flathead County. Of the 75% repeat visitors, 62% visited in summer and 25% in winter with 71% planning to return within 2 years. Many return and stay as residents resulting in population growth which must be dealt with and accommodated in a balanced, economic fashion.

These figures may be compared with the indicators for Montana state tourism. In 2003 Flathead County, including Glacier Park ranked third in number of revenue dollars, behind Yellowstone and Gallatin counties. There were 9.67 million nonresident visitors in 2003 which was a 9% increase in 2003 over 2002, amounting to 10 visitors for every Montana resident.

In 2003, nonresident travel expenditures totaled over \$1.87 billion, generating over \$2.62 billion in total economic impact with continuing growth forecast for 2004. These economic impacts contributed to the generation of 37,000 jobs statewide, and over \$738 million in personal income. That amounted to \$2,000 for every Montana resident. Non-residential taxes generated amounted to \$134 million revenue for state and local levels and \$171 million for federal level. Montana has a statewide accommodations tax of 7% on overnight lodging. In addition travelers contribute through excise taxes on items such as those on gasoline and alcohol.

The tourism industry employs 32,000 people, making it the state's largest employer with \$492 million annual payroll. (Figures from Institute of Tourism and Recreation Research, University of Montana which is a regional non-profit Tourism Mission made up of businesses in eight counties involved in promoting tourism.)

The two main indicators of travel in Montana are Glacier and Yellowstone National Parks. They both started out the year of 2003 with a large increase in visitation. When wildfires hit, visitation dropped to 43 percent lower than the same period in 2002. This is an indication that as forest health declines with increased incidence of fire, the tourist industry is affected. (See References: Montana Economic Outlook Seminar. p.17)

Continuing tourist appeal of the region depends upon maintenance of environmental quality, healthy air and water, scenic landscape and well maintained facilities. Access to these amenities through legislative policies must be assured. Regulations and management of natural resources and associated services must protect private businesses that provide the revenues for financing the stewardship and sustainability of environment, wildlife and human habitat historically characteristic of Flathead County.

1. GOAL: Facilitate and maximize economic opportunities that capitalize on resources having appeal to visitors as well as local citizens.

Objective 1A: Protect the quality of landscapes and geographic resources that have appeal and provide sources of enjoyment and recreation. These should include Glacier Park, Flathead Lake and Forest Service lands with hiking, fishing, camping and other opportunities that appeal to visitors.

Objective 1B: Provide opportunities for recreational activities both motorized and non-motorized.

Objective 1C: Facilitate public access, use and enjoyment of public lands both federal and state.

Objective 1D: Retain and possibly expand such facilities as campgrounds, picnic areas, fishing lakes, hiking trails and other such amenities within the Park.

2. GOAL: Maintain active involvement in cooperative efforts to facilitate a working relationship between, private and public activities in support of tourism opportunities.

Objective 2A: Exert cooperative effort on those measures deemed expedient to protect the quality of natural resources. Avoid those restrictions deemed unnecessary and against the public interest if not scientifically and technically substantiated such as: fuels reduction, trail access, and road maintenance vs. closure.

Objective 2B: Seek and expand those procedures and activities that facilitate and merge the interests of the public, private property owners and managers of public lands in the interests of more satisfactory utilization of natural resources.

Objective 2C: Work cooperatively to develop and maintain a transportation system both within and outside of the park to get visitors to the park from outlying communities and through the park maximizing convenience and enjoyment. These should include service from hotels and motels.

3. GOAL: Protect the economic interests of the County and involved Agencies which relate to revenues derived from natural resources within the County associated with tourism, while keeping in mind that these lands are for the enjoyment of all people of all ages and economic levels.

Policy 1: It shall be the policy of Flathead County to consider, review, and comment upon draft plans and environmental impact statements affecting natural resource use related to tourist attractions within the County.

RECREATION

Recreational opportunities abound in Flathead County. From the Bob Marshall, Great Bear Wilderness, Jewell Basin Hiking Area and the mountainous areas of the Flathead National Forest and Glacier Park. There are many state, federal and private owned camp and picnic grounds plus the numerous lakes, streams, and rivers accessible to the public.

Motorized recreation opportunities, by comparison, are more restricted than in prior years on National Forest lands due to protection of the grizzly bear by road closures and road obliteration. The lack of motorized access reduces recreational activities for many people who are unable to hike. It has negatively impacted the economics, custom and culture of Flathead County.

Recreation and tourism are an important part of local business viability throughout Flathead County. Recreational activities such as camping, picnicking, hiking, boating, fishing, rafting, golf berry picking, photography, traveling by horseback, auto and OHV, aerial flights, hunting and fishing in the fall; snowmobiling, downhill skiing, cross country skiing, ice fishing. Local businesses and the service sector depend heavily on the influx of visitors' year around to federal, state, and private lands which provide the recreational opportunities.

1. Goal: Encourage a broad spectrum of recreation opportunities on lands in Flathead County.

Objective 1A: Provide opportunities for primitive recreational activities, motorized and non-motorized uses, camping, fishing, and horseback riding.

Objective 1B: Encourage recreational activities for pleasure as well as those that enhance and encourage opportunities for economic development in the County.

Objective 1C: Encourage recreational activities on the lands in Flathead County that increase the capacity for federal and state land resources to provide more economic return to the county. Developed recreation sites offering a high level of amenities and services should be maintained or expanded by offering for bid long-term (25 years or more) leases for private enterprise investors to install, manage and maintain visitor improvements and services and to charge fees necessary to provide such facilities and services. Developed sites support the diverse recreation opportunities on which Flathead County economy depends. The Forest Service should provide free-of-charge low level improvements, especially those needed to accommodate dispersed public recreation such as trail head parking, outhouses, stock ramps and hitching rails, boat launch sites, trash containers, etc. Existing developed recreation site capacities should be increased by 25% by 2015.

Objective 1D: Continue to seek out and expand upon cooperative efforts with interested user groups.

Objective 1E: Determine on status maps where the areas of interest for recreation are located.

Objective 1F: When notified that a planning or decision making effort is beginning, the County should submit comments in writing, describing issues they need to have addressed in support of the County. Status maps are available at the County Planning Office and Court House.

Policy 1: It should be the policy of Flathead County to consider, review, and comment upon all draft plans and environmental impact statements affecting recreation in Flathead County when deemed necessary.

2. GOAL: Encourage recognition of the social, cultural, and economic significance of recreation in the region, and encourage implementation of policies that will ensure the viability of recreational opportunities.

3. GOAL: Encourage implementation of plans and programs that provide a balance of year around motorized and non-motorized summer recreational opportunities in Flathead County and northwestern Montana.

Objective 3 A: Road and trail management will maintain a reasonable balance of roads open for public use and roads closed to protect wildlife and to provide for non-motorized recreation opportunity distributed throughout the Forest. Fifty percent of the Flathead Forest is designated wilderness and classified non-motorized areas. A reasonable balance that provides non-motorized access opportunities in the multiple use half of the forest should result in a minimum of 75% of system roads open for public motorized access and use with non-motorized opportunities distributed across the Forest. Open roads should be distributed across the forest so that public use is not concentrated but dispersed throughout the Forest.

Objective 3 B: The multiple use trail system on non-wilderness lands must provide a reasonable balance of opportunities winter and summer for a broad spectrum of users. Since there are thousands of miles of wilderness and other special classified areas closed to motorized use, no more than 25% of the trails outside wilderness will be closed to motorized use. District Rangers will work with various user groups to identify the most desirable locations for restricted trails to provide quality opportunities for various users, equestrian, hikers, x-country skiers, mountain bikes, motorcycles, ATVs, 4x4's, as well as expanded multiple use trail opportunities.

Objective 3 C: No more than 25% of non-wilderness area should be restricted from snowmobiling, and that distribution of use will also apply to high quality alpine ridges (as defined by soil inventory maps) outside of wilderness or other classified areas

CULTURAL, GEOLOGIC AND PALEONTOLOGICAL RESOURCES

Flathead County contains many special features. Some by their remote and rugged nature are largely protected, but others are known to have existed and have been greatly disturbed and/or destroyed.

Where an imminent threat to these special features is identified, mitigation efforts necessary to protect significant scientific, educational, and recreational value will be identified. Many other special features are susceptible to damage by recreation seekers.

Examples of disturbance to sites are the construction of Kerr Dam at the outlet of Flathead Lake and the construction of Hungry Horse Dam and the created reservoir. The raised level of Flathead Lake by Kerr Dam covered known Native American campsites in Bigfork Bay at the outlet of the Swan River. The site originally contained willow thickets and campsites and is now covered by water at full pool but at low pool sandy beaches are exposed. People still, to this day, hunt for flint arrowheads and other primitive stone tools on the beaches. Hungry Horse Reservoir extends for approximately 35 miles covering the South Fork of the Flathead River. That portion of river was a main travel route for Native Americans and latter day settlers, loggers, miners, Forest Service workers, and recreationists. The results of the reservoir has covered and obliterated previously known features. The U.S. Forest Service, in recent years, has examined possible sites during low water periods of the reservoir.

A pictograph site exists west of Kalispell and has suffered damages by the public. Indian pictographs located on rock faces near the interior of the Lost Trail National Wildlife Refuge will be surveyed and protected. There are also known hard rock mine sites.

The North Fork River area has remnants of coal deposits that were excavated in the late 1800's & early 1900's. Oil exploration and drilling took place early 1900's in the Kintla Creek area. Canadians actively worked for coal and oil on the Canadian side in the North Fork River area. There are known but unused hard rock mines in the county.

Most routes of travel by Native Americans have been covered by roads or abandoned and overgrown by brush and trees with the advent of roads. Undoubtedly some travel routes were used by the Forest Service and travelers into the backcountry areas.

A extensive source of information covering Flathead County and the Flathead National Forest about cultural, geological, and paleontological resources can be found in the book titled "Trails of the Past: Historic Overview of the Flathead National Forest, Montana, 1800 - 1960 by Kathryn L. McKay. Additionally, many books with information are available in the Flathead County Library and at local bookstores.

1. GOAL: Encourage the preservation of all parts of our cultural heritage.

Objective 1A: Recognition of special features in Flathead County, including:

- * Caves in the North Fork area.
- * Caves in the Spotted Bear area.
- * Fault line in the Lake Blaine area.
- * Lewis fault line in the Marias Pass area.

WILDERNESS

The Wilderness Act of 1964 created a National Wilderness Preservation System to be composed of federally managed lands designated by Congress as "wilderness areas." The Act defined wilderness as "*an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain.*" The definition states that a wilderness is in "contrast with those areas where man and his own works dominate the landscape." The Act provides that all suitable wilderness areas should be inventoried by the federal agency charged with management responsibility for the particular area. This inventory and recommendations by the agency as to whether the areas should be established as wilderness areas were to be completed within (10) years of passage. In the Federal Land Policy Management Act of 1976, Congress established a clear directive that by 1991, the Secretary of the Interior must review all roadless areas of 5,000 acres or more on the federally managed lands (identified as having wilderness characteristics as described in the Wilderness Act) and give to the President a recommendation as to the suitability or non-suitability of each such area for preservation as wilderness.

Within Flathead County, the Flathead National Forest contains the Bob Marshal Wilderness and the Great Bear Wilderness, totaling 641,538 acres. Other designated special areas are the Jewell Basin Hiking Area; the Coram Experimental Forest designated a United Nations *Biosphere Reserve*, the Miller Creek Demonstration Forest and the LeBeau Natural Area.

Glacier National Park is located in the northeast corner of Flathead County from the Continental Divide west to the North Fork of the Flathead River and from the Canadian border south to the Middle Fork of the Flathead River. Glacier National Park is designated a *Biosphere Reserve* by the United Nations without the approval of the United States Congress.

1. GOAL: Flathead County will facilitate the procedures for designation and management of wilderness areas in Flathead County.

Policy 1: Flathead County will forward to Congress and to the appropriate decision-making agencies its recommendations regarding areas proposed as wilderness or non-wilderness areas. Said recommendations will be based upon the evaluation of affects upon Flathead County and northwest Montana.

THREATENED, ENDANGERED, AND SENSITIVE SPECIES

The keystone of good environmental stewardship lies in a healthy resource base. Endangered and threatened species, as well as all plants and all animals, depend on the intricate balance of stable ecological, economic, and social functions of the immediate community.

Flathead County will pay particular attention to all species designated in any category or classification for protection, or consideration of protection, under the Endangered Species Act.

On National Forest Lands in Flathead County the imposed Grizzly Bear Recovery Standards have significantly eliminated road access to the National Forest Lands. Such loss of access has precluded timber management and harvest in the dedicated timber base of the National Forest thereby affecting the economy, social, custom and culture of Flathead County. Not consulting with local government on the impacts of E.S.A. actions is contrary to the laws and regulations of the Endangered Species (E.S.A.) and the National Environmental Protection Act (N.E.P.A.).

1. GOAL: Flathead County will participate in the proposed designation, delisting and management of any species designated in any category or classification for protection or consideration of protection, under the Endangered Species Act or similar designations.

Objective 1A: Compliance with the full procedural provisions of applicable state and federal statutes.

Objective 1B: Flathead County will participate fully with federal and state agencies to prepare an analysis of the economic and social impacts such designation will have on County prior to the designation or delisting of any species for protection under the Endangered Species Act.

Objective 1C: Flathead County will consider the information from the above analysis to develop a coordinated management plan with state and federal agencies for the management of any species designated for protection or delisting under the Endangered Species Act.

Objective 1D: Flathead County will participate fully and coordinate with federal and state agencies to prepare an analysis of the economic and social impacts such an introduction or reintroduction will have on the County prior to the introduction or reintroduction of species designated for protection under the Endangered Species Act.

Objective 1E: Flathead County believes that protection of endangered and threatened species can be most effectively achieved by cooperation between private landowners and public land users rather than by imposing land-use restrictions and penalties.

REFUGES & WETLANDS PROTECTION AREAS

Flathead County contains wildlife refuges, wetland protection areas, and conservation easements acquired and managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The areas remove private land acreage from the County's tax rolls thereby reducing revenues from private land sources. As with other federal lands the USF&WS lands are subject to the Week's Law 25% Fund of revenues earned and Payment In Lieu of Taxes (PILT) to reimburse annually the affected counties for loss of revenue.

Lost Trail National Wildlife Refuge - 7,885 acres (fee title acres)

Located approximately 25 air-miles west of Kalispell, MT, in a mountain drainage known as Pleasant Valley, the refuge encompasses the 160 acre Dahl Lake.

Prior to acquisition by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service the area was known as the Lost Trail Ranch. In 1996, the Ranch was purchased by the Montana Power Company (MPC) to partially satisfy a mitigative settlement order. The order was issued by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission between MPC, the Department of Interior and the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes to mitigate for wildlife losses and impacts on the Flathead Waterfowl Product Area attributed to past and future operations of Kerr Dam. In 1999, MPC conveyed approximately 3,100 acres of the Ranch to the USFWS. The Service purchased the remaining acreage from MPC under the authority of the Migratory Bird Conservation Act.

Lost Trail NWR was acquired in August of 1999. It is the 519th Refuge in the National Wildlife Refuge System. This national system comprises over 93 million acres of wildlife lands across the nation.

Lost Trail NWR is managed as an entity of the National Bison Range Complex which administers over 40,000 acres of lands in both Flathead and Lake Counties, Montana.

Wetland Protection Areas:

All WPA's are smaller tracts of wetlands and uplands purchased with funds from the sale of Federal Duck Stamps under the Small Wetlands Acquisition Program.

	<u>Acquired</u>	<u>Acreage</u>
Flathead	1970-01	2,370
McGregor Meadows	1999	799
Batavia	1974-75	510
Smith Lake	1972-73	975
Blasdel	1987	535
Total Acreage		<hr/> 5,189

Conservation Easements:

Units that contain habitat for waterfowl are purchased from willing sellers when money and acreage are available. Units are sometimes expanded as opportunities arise. Data is unknown and unavailable for Flathead County at this date.

- 1. GOAL:** Flathead County will facilitate the procedures for designation and management of proposed wildlife refuges, wetland protection areas and conservation easements in Flathead County.

Policy 1. Flathead County will forward to Congress and to the appropriate decision-making agencies its recommendations regarding areas proposed as wildlife refuges, wetland protection areas and conservation easements. Said recommendations will be based upon the evaluation of affects upon Flathead County and northwest Montana.

WILD AND SCENIC RIVERS

The National Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, 16 U.S.C. 88 1271-1287, provides the guidance for identification and designation of individual river segments for study, and for recommendation for inclusion as a Wild and Scenic River. Section 1271 calls for protection of "certain selected rivers of the Nation which with their immediate environments, possess outstandingly remarkable scenic, recreational, geologic, fish and wildlife, historic, cultural or other similar values."

Under 16 U.S.C. - 1283, any federally managed lands which include, border on, or are adjacent to any river included in, or under consideration for inclusion in, the national system must be managed by the Secretary of Interior so as to protect such rivers in accordance with the purposes of the Act. However, 16 U.S.C. - 1283 Co), provides that the section is not to be "construed to abrogate any existing rights, privileges, or contracts affecting Federal lands held by any private party without the consent of said party."

Within Flathead County there are approximately 23,134 acres designated under the Wild and Scenic River Act. Wilderness Areas total 641,538 acres. The North Fork of the Flathead River from the Canadian border south to Camas Creek Road is designated Scenic River. From the Camas Bridge to the confluence with the South Fork of the Flathead River is designated as Recreation River. The Middle Fork of the Flathead River from its beginning near the Continental Divide and Gooseberry Park to its intersection of Bear Creek and U.S. Hwy 2 is designated as Wild River. From that point to its confluence with the North Fork of the Flathead River is designated Recreation River. The confluence of these two rivers form the Flathead River which is designated as recreation and the classification ends with its confluence with the South Fork of the Flathead River near Badrock Canyon at its confluence with the South Fork of the Flathead River.

The South Fork of the Flathead River from the south end of Hungry Horse Reservoir to below Spotted Bear Ranger Station is designated as Scenic River. From that point south to the Flathead County boundary line near Big Salmon River is designated as Wild River with the classification extending into Powell County to Youngs Fork

1. **GOAL:** Flathead County will cooperate in the evaluation of any further proposed designations of Wild and Scenic river segments or similar designations in Flathead County.

Objective 1A: Develop a County management plan for any further proposed Wild and Scenic River segment or similar designation in the County. Big game winter ranges should be managed to maintain desired forage-cover ratios over time to ensure sustained productivity. Fifty percent of forested big game winter ranges should be analyzed and treated using commercial timber harvest and other methods to bring the critical winter ranges into the desired forage-cover ratios by 2015, and 90-100 percent by 2020.

Objective 1B: Uphold the legal requirements and qualifications set forth by the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act including those providing for the continuation of existing uses. Additional regulation of existing uses would occur only to prevent unnecessary or undue degradation of the environment. Non-forested big game winter ranges will be renewed through prescribed burning every 15-25 years to maintain and improve forage production.

Objective 1C: Review any proposed Wild and Scenic River recommendations in relation to the impacts on natural resource based industries, the economic stability of the County, and on the custom and culture of the citizens of Flathead County.

WILDLIFE

Hunting both big game (including elk, deer, moose, grizzly and black bear) and waterfowl, and upland game birds has been a traditional part of life in Flathead County even before the first settlers. In early days, hunting and trapping of fur bearing animals was a necessity for survival. Today it is less essential but still provides a food and income resource for many people. Flathead County is known for its big game hunting and provides good hunting for County residents and out of state visitors.

Income for County residents is provided by activities such as employment for outfitters and guides, selling supplies, and equipment, and providing lodging and meals to hunters. Increased population of wildlife and lack of suitable habitat on National Forest Lands is forcing wildlife to move onto private lands causing damage to private lands and, thus, a negative impact on private property and a hazard to public roads and drivers.

- 1. GOAL:** Maintain and improve wildlife habitat on private and public lands in order to sustain viable and harvestable populations of big game and upland game species, as well as wetland-riparian area habitat for waterfowl, fur-bearers, and a diversity of other game and non-game species.

Objective 1D: Barriers to fish migration (steep culverts, dams, etc.) often protect pure-strain native fish species from hybridization or from non-native predators. No barriers to fish migration (man-made or natural) will be removed unless genetic testing shows upstream fish populations to be hybridized or populated with non-native species that is the similar to fish populations below the barrier.

- 2. GOAL:** Encourage coordination with the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks in consultation with all affected landowners, lessees, permittees to develop specific Wildlife Management Plans.

Objective 2A: Wildlife Management Plans should include annual head count, population targets, harvest guidelines, special hunts to mitigate damage to private property, and guidelines for future site-specific management plans affecting upland game birds, waterfowl and big game habitat. National Forest lands should be included in such planning.

Objective 2B: Wildlife Management Plans will be directed toward maintaining healthy balanced wildlife populations in conjunction with available habitat.

Objective 2C: Encourage open land and forest land studies to monitor wildlife relationships to the available habitat and the impact on vegetation enhancement projects for wildlife.

Objective 2D: Initiate cooperative studies with willing private landowners on wildlife damage to farmland, timberland, and related concerns.

Objective 2E: Encourage reconciling wildlife population fluctuations related to both habitat condition and other non-habitat impacts on reproduction and survival.

Objective 2F: Encourage development of a record keeping system tracking the incidence and disposition of wildlife damage and predation on government and private lands.

Objective 2G: Collaborate and coordinate with federal and state agency on plans and regulations regarding wildlife to ensure coordination with the County Comprehensive Plan.

Objective 2H: Encourage cooperation between federal and state agencies and private landowners to provide ` stable wildlife populations.

Objective 2I: Open access roads for late-season hunts, when expected harvest quotas have not been met is especially important.

Objective 2J: Coordinate with the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks in consultation with all affected landowners, lessees, and permittees to develop specific wildlife population targets, harvest guidelines, and late-season and special hunts when harvest guidelines are not met.

FISHERIES

Fishing has been a traditional part of life in Flathead County even before the first settlers.

In the early days, native people and European settlers fished for their survival. Today fishing provides food and recreational sport for many citizens. The nation knows Flathead County for its high quality fishing. Our clean lakes and blue ribbon streams provide excellent fishing opportunities for residents and visitors. Fishing guides, fishing equipment retailers, the hospitality industry, and others derive economic benefit from the fishery resource. Flathead County strives to maintain, perpetuate and improve this important resource.

Fisheries Management Authority

The Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MDFWP) has management authority over Montana fisheries (MCA 23-2-101, MCA 87-1-201, MCA 87-11-301) with the exception of reservation and national park lands.

The Flathead drainage is a challenging place to manage fish. Many fish species migrate. Management must take into account the requirements of British Columbia, Glacier National Park, the Great Bear and Bob Marshall wilderness areas, numerous state, county and local jurisdictions, private and corporate landowners, private and federal hydropower dam operations and the sovereign nation of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribe (CSKT), U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife service, downstream counties and the state of Idaho.

MDFWP does not yet have a Flathead County fisheries management plan. The Fisheries Division intends to develop drainage-based plans across the state. MDFWP developed a Flathead Fisheries Co-management Plan with CSKT that sets mutual goals and management strategies for the interconnected fisheries in the Flathead Lake and River system. The listing of bull trout under the Endangered Species Act shifted management of that species to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) relicensing of Kerr Dam handed most mitigation authority for Flathead Lake to CSKT.

The South Fork Flathead River Fisheries Management Plan, the statewide Warm Water Fisheries Management Plan, the Five-year Stocking Plan, the Montana Bull Trout Management Plan, and the Westslope Cutthroat Conservation Agreement provide some direction to fisheries management in Flathead County.

Balancing native and introduced species

With regard to balancing native and introduced fisheries, the MDFWP has a dual mission to protect Montana's aquatic natural resources and native fishes and to provide recreational fishing opportunities. This has become an increasing challenge. The department has outlined a strategy to address this issue in "Fisheries Beyond 2000: Fisheries Program Strategic Plan 1999-2010".

Balance Commercial (Guided) and Recreational Angling

There is a growing guided angling use of Montana's fisheries. The Board of Outfitters, under the Department of Commerce, manages guiding and outfitting. MDFWP has no role in this process. Some land managers such as USFS and Department of Natural Resources (DNRC) regulate outfitted use across and within their lands.

- 1. GOAL:** Participate with Montana Fish, Wildlife, & Parks or other relevant agencies to preserve and enhance the fisheries resource in Flathead County.

Objective 1A: Prevent the spread of disease such as whirling disease.

Objective 1B: Prevent the degradation of fisheries through over use.

Objective 1C: Maintain healthy forests for productive watersheds.

2. GOAL: Strike a balance between native and introduced species of fish where both are currently present in a fishery.

Objective 2A: Support policies and programs that emphasize responsible management of fish populations, native fish and sport fisheries

Objective 2B: Support protection and restoration of fish habitat.

Objective 2C: Support MDFWP in its fish hatchery program to stock lakes and reservoirs where natural reproduction is limited or lacking and, where appropriate, using the hatchery program to fulfill management objectives for conservation programs.

Objective 2D: Support monitoring and regulating angler harvests to maintain fish populations.

Objective 2E: Support education programs and the maintenance of adequate public access to fisheries.

3. Goal: Strike a balance between the commercial (guides & outfitters) and recreation anglers.

Objective 3A: Support policies that provide ample opportunity for residential angling opportunities.

Objective 3B: Ensure that guide and outfitter interests are fairly considered.

Objective 3C: Ensure sustainable fisheries over time.

References:

1. *South Ford Flathead River Fisheries Management Plan*
2. *Warm Water Fisheries Management Plan*
3. *Five year Stocking Plan*
4. *Montana Bull Trout Management Plan*
5. *Westslope Cutthroat Conservation Agreement*
6. *Fisheries Beyond 2000: Fisheries Program Strategic Plan 1999-2010*

ANIMAL CONTROL

Flathead County contains many predatory animals. Grizzly bears, black bears, wolves, wolverines, mountain lions, bobcats, lynx, and coyotes are the larger variety. Skunks, raccoons, marten, mink, muskrats and beaver are some of the common smaller variety with raccoons and skunks causing the most problems. There are other smaller varmints that can and do damage to agricultural lands and other properties.

Grizzly bears, wolves, and lynx have achieved federal protection under the Endangered Species Act when in previous times were controlled by hunting permits. Black bears, mountain lions and bobcats are currently controlled by applied hunting seasons and limits. Coyotes are subject to elimination on sight.

Since the Northern Continental Divide Grizzly Bear Recovery Area applies to most of the Flathead National Forest Lands within the boundaries of Flathead County there is little control of the grizzly bear that wanders onto the private lands within the County. Reports of grizzly bears and black bears in close proximity to towns and homes are very common. Control measures are by Federal and State bear trappers.

1. GOAL: Control predatory animals to reduce property damage.

Objective 1A: Maintain trapping as an historic and environmentally sound method of controlling predatory animals.

Objective 1B: Secure household and business wastes in closed containers and in locations that will not attract wildlife.

Objective 1C: Secure pets in ways that discourage predatory behavior towards wildlife.

2. GOAL: Encourage control of disease-bearing vectors, predators and rodents that are a recognized threat to public health.

Objective 2A: Encourage protection of private lands bordering Federal and State lands from predatory animals and property damage.

Objective 2B: Protection should fall within the boundaries of good husbandry and sound environmental restraints, not to exclude chemical control.

Objective 2C: Encourage retention of and expansion of an animal damage-control plan for the protection of livestock, crops and humans.

Objective 2D: Government and private entities are encouraged to coordinate their pest control actions and regulations with those of Flathead County.

Objective 2E: Government and private entities are encouraged to prepare and implement plans for controlling animals and rodents in accordance with recognized and proven husbandry practices.

LAW ENFORCEMENT

- 1. GOAL:** Preserve and protect the peace and dignity of the people of Flathead County; protect their rights and privileges established under the Montana Constitution and the Constitution of the United States.

Objective 1A: Develop interagency cooperative agreements to insure full cooperation of federal and state law enforcement agencies with the Flathead County Sheriff.

Objective 1B: Flathead County Sheriff should be advised of law enforcement activities within Flathead County.

Objective 1C: All law enforcement agencies are encouraged to cooperate with the Flathead County Sheriff.

Objective 1D: Flathead County Sheriff is to have prior notification by any state law enforcement agency of any investigations, searches, arrests, or any other law enforcement activities.

- 2. GOAL:** Obtain the maximum Federal and State funding available to support local law enforcement and related activities which may include fighting fire, search and rescue, and other activities as needed.

Objective 2A: Apply for and have State and Federal agency support and concurrence to budget and appropriated funds for local law enforcement and related activities.

Objective 2B: Develop interagency cooperative agreements with respect to budget and appropriated funds for local law enforcement and related activities.

Objective 2C: Enhance the County law enforcement training programs through available State and Federal funds and state and federal training programs and facilities.

Objective 2D: Create a written policy and/or protocol for working with Federal and State law enforcement agencies.

THE CONTINUING PROCESS

The Flathead County Board of Commissioners recognizes that this plan is an interim plan. The Flathead Natural Resource Document will be a work in continuous progress. It will require the cooperation, work, and dedication of many County residents. Additional planning alternatives will be developed and added to this plan as needed. The ongoing planning will include consideration of all historic and current land uses in Flathead County.